

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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VEDIC PRAYERS

तं त्वा गीर्भिर्गिर्वणसं द्रविणस्युं द्रविणोदः ।
सपर्येम सपर्यवः ॥

—Rg Veda, 2.6.3

O Giver of Wealth! O Agni! You are pleased by hymns and oblations. We shall serve you with our hymns and sacrifices.

स बोधि सूरिर्मघवा वसुपते वसुदावन् ।
युयोध्यस्मद्वेषांसि ॥

—Rg Veda, 2.6.4

O Agni! You are the lord of food. You are the awakener. You are the embodiment of knowledge. You are the lord of wealth and also the giver of wealth. Please destroy our enemies by fighting them.

स नो वृष्टिं दिवस्परि स नो वाजमनर्वाणम् ।
स नः सहस्रिणीरिषः ॥

—Rg Veda, 2.6.5

This great god Agni showers rains from the higher regions for our benefit. May he bestow unfailing strength on us. And may he also bestow thousands of varieties of inexhaustible wealth on us.

Identity

EDITORIAL

Recently, some young men were celebrating India's victory in a cricket match. One of them, however, appeared sad and dejected. When someone asked him why he wasn't happy, he replied: 'The player from my state was out for a duck. Whether Indians win or not isn't my concern; I'm concerned with our player, because he may not be included in the team the next time.' This example from a very popular game was only to show the extent of globalization we have achieved!

There's an alarming increase in identity crisis all over the world now. While we are proud of our glorious present-day civilization, and say that we must study history to know how uncivilized people lived in the past, the media brings news of our savagery every day. Of all causes of conflict, religious and ethnic conflicts have been the favourite pastime in recent times. Millions of people have been killed in the name of identity. Bosnia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, some African countries, Indonesia—the list of so-called civilized countries burning with tension is endless. All this is due to the crisis of identity: we don't know where we belong.

Instinct Before Identity

Identity is the fact of being what we are. Its expression is in the sense of belonging which we grow towards someone or something. Our identity defines the characteristics that we already have or develop. We have identities and identities—with groups and institutions, with parties and religious sects, with regions and states; and perhaps the idea of a universal identity is Utopian.

That we humans are social beings is an age-old truth; we always desire to belong. Isolated cases apart, it's simply impossible for us to lead lives absolutely cut off from the world.

We need to interact with others in order to survive. Modern-day economics, based on the principle of exchange, has made it further impossible to survive in isolation. We buy and sell, produce and distribute, all within society itself. The inevitability of social interaction notwithstanding, our main interest appears to be ourselves.

We earn money, and it brings happiness to *us*. All our business is instinctively based on the idea that *we* should be happy and affluent. This idea of our own good at the cost of that of others is called self-interest. So self-interest appears to be the dominant, instinctive factor in our lives. The father of classical economics, Adam Smith, wrote that 'self-interest dominates the majority of men.'¹ Speaking about this, Prof Amartya Sen says—in a remarkable lecture he gave at Oxford in November 1998—that Smith did not mean self-interest is the basis of all growth. He was only speaking about the fundamental motivation of human beings.²

So we are born into the contemporary situation with self-interest. Children are taught that if they study well, they can become 'big' people when they grow up; they get a good job, money, etc. If we manufacture good things, we get back a lot of money. So it's all a question of bargain or exchange.

But is this ideal adequate? Agreed that in the animal world 'I first and I last' is the natural and reasonable form of identity, as most of the animals can't think any farther; and a large

1. Quoted from *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* by Prof Amartya Sen in *Reason Before Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.3. [Hereafter, *Reason Before Identity*.]

2. Ibid.

percentage of human beings too lead similar lives. But the rational individual needs something more. Moreover, as Prof Amartya Sen says, exchange itself is not everything; 'distribution is important, and so is production, including the need for work motivation and discipline....'³

Emotion Before Identity

Fortunately for us, we see departures from self-interest. Why departures? There may be several reasons, but as Prof Sen says, it's not necessary that someone's manifesting less self-interest should mean he or she has grown an interest in the well-being of other people. Even the most self-centred individual too is seen to show interest in others occasionally: when there's an accident in front of him, perhaps a terribly selfish individual may want to display his helping nature and begin helping the accident victim. Instances of selfish public interest is evident to all newspaper readers and TV-viewers today: the way politicians display photogenic sympathy for the poor when elections are around is something for everyone to enjoy. Thus a person may be identifying with others simply out of necessity, or a compelling situation. But this is not the type of identity we are interested in.

There are genuine cases of lack of self-interest even as there are gradations of communitarian identity. We shall concentrate on this now. We all grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Environment, education, and innate craving to outgrow limitations make us undergo maturation. Growth broadens us. We gradually wake up to the reality that self-centred life is counterproductive and harmful. Our maturity is proportional to the reduction of self-interest.

There are several ways in which we may identify ourselves with our society. We may discuss a few here. The first is the natural, emotional connection. Let's call this the 'club connection'. Such a connection, born of the natural affiliation with other like-minded in-

dividuals, is identifying with a larger group or sharing common interests. It's like cricket-lovers gathering together when there's a one-day match; but these people may differ when it comes to other identities. Or it's like the opposition parties, united in opposing everything that the government does, just because they are the opposition. At the workplace, club connection works as common ideologies which some people hold with respect to pay, perks, etc. In the field of religion, it's the religious affiliation that unites people.

The second way of identity is, using Prof Amartya Sen's term, the 'discovery' connection. He gives the wonderful example of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*. We could also cite the Karna example from the *Mahabharata*. Karna suddenly becomes aware when Kunti tells him that the Pandavas are his blood-brothers. There's a turmoil and a clash of identity in his mind then. What would he do now? He had some common interests and so had joined the Kaurava camp. At the brink of war he sees he is at a crossroads.

Reason Before Identity

So we have reason. We borrow this sub-heading from Amartya Sen's book. The third connection, according to Prof Sen, is the 'choice' connection. When Karna discovered his true identity, he still had two options before him: to either betray his lifelong friend and ally, Duryodhana, or fight his own brothers. He deliberated and told Kunti: 'I shall stay where I am, mother, but shall fight and kill only Arjuna.'

Choice needs deliberation. One has to think and choose. According to Prof Amartya Sen, choice is the best way of social identity: '...there's a significant role of reasoning in the choice of identity, and there are good grounds for rejecting the presumption that social identity is a matter of "discovery" rather than involving a process that incorporates choice.'⁴

This brings us to the question of choosing our social identity. First of all, why choose

identities when we have been either born into, or brought up with, some social identity? The reason is, we have been given the power to reason. We can't remain true to something which is corrupt and degenerate, and work for it. Swami Vivekananda says: 'You had better die as an unbeliever than be played upon by cheats and jugglers. The power of reasoning was given you for use. Show then that you have used it properly. Doing so, you will be able to take care of higher things.'⁵ But can we shift identities just like we leave a job which is not paying well and go for another, or take a quiet house for a noisy one? Yes, asserts Prof Sen, but adds that we can think and decide.

However, there's no doubt that choices are limited. Just because the United States of America is the greatest economic power in terms of GNP, you can't wish to become an American and earn a lot of money. Our colour, race, etc are all blocks to free choice. Moreover, there's authoritarian repression, as in dictatorial societies, where choice is minimal. During the 1970s, how many Tutsis must have not dreamt to be Hutus to escape murder and flee from Rwanda! How many Cambodians under the tyrant Pol Pot haven't wished they had lived somewhere in India or America to escape death! Choices are limited. But still we have to think and choose our social identity in order to lead sane lives.

There is, however, a problem in choice itself. Choice should be based on objective thinking and not subjective presumptions. Most of our thinking is based on self-interest. Mass conversions that take place in India are not because the poor, ignorant villagers suddenly discover Jesus to be their saviour or that they begin to love Christ. It's desire for a few pennies that makes them shift over to the other faith. To really think of newer identities, we have to think freely, and independently of all our presumptions. A New Yorker may

have been a Republican all his life but can be disillusioned with it towards the end and become a Democrat, or vice versa. Prof Amartya Sen discusses briefly the influence of upbringing, social situation, knowledge, etc in our thinking, but affirms that our thinking is not determined by these factors, though they may be influenced by them.⁶

Reasoning presupposes education. Education makes men of lambs, and Swami Vivekananda was the first person to discover the true malady ailing Indian society when he said that education was the panacea for all social ills. Education makes us think, and become broad, so that we open the windows of our soul. But there's a difference between true education and 'false' education. True education is, in Swami Vivekananda's words, is manifesting inner perfection.⁷ True education makes us stand on our own feet.

Reasoning and then choosing social identity is thus the best option before us, rational human beings. Instead of blindly following our instincts and emotions, we must use our rationality and choose whom and what to identify ourselves with. This will lead to a proper implementation of social justice and all other virtues; this will also prevent unnecessary crimes against humanity.

One final doubt: how long can this shifting of loyalties and identities go on? Prof Sen allows for the oscillation of identities, and quotes Emma Rothschild, who says that 'oscillation (of identities) may be "a continuous and prized quality of civilized society."⁸

Concentration Before Identity

When all is said and done, there are some reservations with respect to shifting of identities. First, we are, after all, human beings with a great many limitations. We can't keep on thinking newer ideologies with our little minds, and so go for newer type of affiliations, every day. Second, even rational and thought-

5. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 4, p. 59. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

6. *Reason Before Identity*, p. 23.

7. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 358.

8. *Reason Before Identity*, p. 17.

ful shifting of identities have an element of self-interest in them, and it is not altogether impossible to be absolutely selfless in choice. Third, is social identity enough? Are we mere social beings? Four, reason itself has its limitations, which the spiritual world has discovered long, long ago. Five, an altogether different type of, and a better type of, social identity is possible. And six, total selflessness is not a mere figure of speech. Swami Vivekananda says: 'It is perfectly true that our reason cannot go beyond the senses; all reasoning is within the senses, and reason is based upon the facts which the senses reach. But can a man go beyond the senses? Can a man know the unknowable? Upon this the whole question of religion...has been decided.'⁹ That's where religion leads us—to a world beyond the pale of the senses.

We should not hazard the conclusion that reasoning has been decried by religion. All great prophets and saints have stated that reasoning is important and vital. But, at the same time, they have understood and declared that reasoning has its limitations. Swami Vivekananda says:

Life is but momentary, whether you are a downtrodden man living in one of the big streets of the big cities of the West or a crowned Emperor ruling over millions. Life is but momentary, whether you have the best of health or the worst. Life is but momentary, whether you have the most poetical temperament or the most cruel. There is but one solution of life, says the Hindu, and that solution is what they call God and Religion. If these be true, life becomes explained, life becomes bearable, becomes enjoyable. Otherwise, life is but a useless burden. That is our idea, but no amount of reasoning can demonstrate it; it can only make it probable, and there it rests. ... Facts have to be perceived, and we have to perceive religion to demonstrate it to ourselves. We have to sense God to be convinced that there is a God. We must sense the facts of religion to know that

they are facts. Nothing else, and no amount of reasoning, but our own perception can make these things real to us, can make my belief firm as a rock. That is my idea, and that is the Indian idea.'¹⁰

Where the intellect ends, Vedanta begins. Thus we are led to the threshold of the glorious system the human mind has invented, called Vedanta. What is the goal of Vedanta?

The Vedanta recognises the reasoning power of man a good deal, although it says there is something higher than intellect; but the road lies through intellect. We need reason to drive out all the old superstitions; and what remains is Vedantism.¹¹

Again,

The Vedanta system begins with tremendous pessimism, and ends with real optimism. We deny the sense-optimism but assert the real optimism of the Supersensuous. That real happiness is not in the senses but above the senses; and it is in every man. The sort of optimism which we see in the world is what will lead to ruin through the senses.¹²

Vedanta is going back, retracing our steps. It is going back from the self, through society, to the Self. To explain: we had self-interest; we outgrew it and became society-conscious; we deliberated further and altered our identity, only to find it something unending, because the more we identify ourselves with the things and thoughts of the world, the more we are drawn outwards. Our centre of gravity should be within us and not outside. But by identifying ourselves with various opinions and ideologies of society, we fix our centre elsewhere, but that 'elsewhere' is itself an unrealistic ground. So we are bound to suffer. In a beautiful mantra, the *Kātha Upaniṣad* declares:¹³ 'The Lord created the senses to look outward; therefore one looks outwards and not within oneself. Some wise man, however,

10. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p.167.

11. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 283.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Kātha Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.

9. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 211.

turns his eyes inward and sees the Self.' We have been looking outwards all the while and interacting with the world. All that we are experiencing as a consequence is only misery and suffering. Many people ask: 'I work so much for others; I have no self-interest at all. But still I suffer. Why?' Such social workers have no proper locus: a drowning person can't save another.

The point is, *we* are the problem, not the allegiance we vow to anyone or anything. And the problems in society don't end; if we identify with them we shall lose ourselves in the desert. The famous fact is that society is like a dog's tail: it remains curled. The more we try to straighten it, the more it will bend; and our suffering will increase. The best course, according to Vedanta, is to correct ourselves. To correct ourselves, we should venture inwards.

The other reason why we should identify ourselves with our higher Self and go inwards is this: In the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, Yajnavalkya says: 'It is not for the sake of the husband or wife or sons and daughters or wealth or knowledge that the husband or wife or sons and daughters or wealth or knowledge are dear, but for the sake of the Self.'¹⁴ Everything we do or think or say is all for the sake of our Self, which is wrongly superimposed on the mind and the body and so imagined to be the mind and the body.

Our self-interest is, therefore, all right, but only the 'self' is not properly identified. The 'self' is not the body or mind, but the Atman. This is the central conviction of Vedanta, and this is the central pivot on which everything turns. Holding on to the Atman is the supreme achievement we can have in life. By 'holding on' concentration is meant.

The strength and force of the blow come through concentration. There is no limit to the power of the human mind. The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on one point; that is the secret. It is easy to concentrate the mind on external things, the mind nat-

urally goes outwards; but not so in the case of religion, or psychology, or metaphysics, where the subject and the object, are one. ... The powers of the mind should be concentrated and turned back upon itself, and as the darkest places reveal their secrets before the penetrating rays of the sun, so will this concentrated mind penetrate its own innermost secrets. Thus will we come to the basis of belief, the real genuine religion. We will perceive for ourselves whether we have souls, whether life is of five minutes or of eternity, whether there is a God in the universe or none. It will all be revealed to us.¹⁵

The moment we begin to identify with the Self, we begin manifesting the supreme power that is hidden within. There's a vast store of potential hidden within, and we are using only a minuscule part of it in our interactions. Once we begin venturing inwards, the innate potential begins to express itself: we begin tapping the source. What happens when we begin to express this innate potential? Says Swami Vivekananda:

This infinite power of the spirit, brought to bear upon matter evolves material development, made to act upon thought evolves intellectuality, and made to act upon itself makes of man a God. First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. 'Be and make.' Let this be our motto.¹⁶

We can benefit society far more by identifying with the Self than by identifying with society. So identifying with the Self is not mere 'religiosity': it's a practical way of serving society.

There are many more benefits from such an identity. The first is the restoration of true social justice. We talk of equality. But no equality is true until it is based on the Self. The Self is the same in all: big and small, poor and rich. There is only one Atman, manifesting as different peoples with different moods, ideologies, temperaments, social status, etc. This

14. *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.5.6.

15. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 130-1.

16. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 351.

oneness based on the Atman is the central truth of Vedanta. So by concentrating on the Self within, we are invoking true oneness which no socialism or communism can ever think of. In the oneness based on the Atman, there is no pretension of failing to notice obvious differences. The Vedantic oneness accepts existential differences, but stresses essential oneness and unity. Differences in social status, religious affinities, cultural backgrounds, regional links, etc are all minor superficialities. The oneness born of the Self is so powerful and so strong that it can eliminate all conflicts and troubles and restore true peace.

The second benefit that accrues from identifying with the Self is inner growth. Concentrating on the Self makes us service-oriented. We try our utmost to serve others selflessly by seeing the selfsame Atman in all. This will not only help build a stronger society than all rational approaches to social identity, but also help manifest our innate divinity. Such a manifestation will bring us the third benefit: the attainment of *real* peace and bliss. By its very nature the Self is the source of true peace and lasting happiness. We talk about peace and harmony in the world. But real peace is within. Once we concentrate on the Self, once we identify ourselves with the Self, we begin radiating peace and bliss. Isn't this the ideal of human life?

Is Such an Identity Possible?

This is the theory of identity. Theorizing is all right. But is there a perfect, practical ex-

ample of someone who has merely concentrated on his Self and brought about tremendous changes in the world? Oh yes, there is!

Sri Ramakrishna is the best example of such a personality. His identity was with the Self. He never discussed social evils or switched identities. He only discussed God and Reality. He simply concentrated on his Self. But today, thanks to his superhuman struggle, spirituality is becoming a reality, interreligious understanding is becoming a reality, social service schemes are becoming a reality, welfare organizations are becoming a reality, and religion itself is becoming a vibrant reality. Jesus Christ said: 'And seek not ye what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God, and everything else shall be added unto you.'¹⁷ And the 'kingdom of God is within you.'¹⁸

Thus from self-interest which scholars decry, through the rational, chosen social identity which they propound, to the Self-interest which Vedanta so boldly declares, it is a journey inwards. Once we begin the journey, saints assure us, we are certain to reach the goal. □

17. *St. Luke*, 12.29-31.

18. *St. Luke*, 17.21.

You, all of you, hear about the various jokes that get into the newspapers about the sea-serpent. ... 'Did your father or grandfather see it?' 'Oh, no, but five thousand years ago such a thing happened.' And if I do not believe it, I have to be barbecued through eternity! What a mass of superstition this is! And its effect is to degrade man from his divine nature to that of brutes. Why was reason given us if we have to believe? Is it not tremendously blasphemous to believe against reason? ... We must reason; and when reason proves to us the truth of these prophets and great men about whom the ancient books speak in every country, we shall believe in them.

—Swami Vivekananda

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

The Greatest Queen

Have you seen the paintings of a woman on horseback with a child tied to her back? That was Lakshmibai. Jhansi Rani Lakshmibai was the daughter of a commoner from Varanasi by name Moropant Tambe, and was born on 19 November 1835. She was married to Gangadhar Rao, a governor of Jhansi, a small Maratha principality in Bundelkhand. Jhansi had once upon a time belonged to the Raos, but the British had made it their principality. So Jhansi was under the British but, according to an agreement in 1804, the Rao family could govern the province. Gangadhar Rao died without an issue, and the day before his death he adopted Damodar as his son. The British did not accept the heir. The province was amalgamated with the vast empire by the British. The widow of Gangadhar, Lakshmibai, repeatedly requested the British to accept the heir but the Imperial government did not care to listen to her. She was asked to shift over to a small building, and the British began to give her a small annual allowance. She began to live like a pious widow. Soon, the unrest of the masses increased even as the rulers' atrocities increased day by day. The rulers had been perpetuating heinous crimes in Jhansi—burning villages, killing men, women and children indiscriminately, slaughtering people mercilessly, levying heavy taxes. Then there was a mutiny by the Indian soldiers of the imperial army: Some people from the ruling class were held captive and released some days later. Ordinary people too were angry at the suffering they were enduring and, in a spate of anger, killed about sixty Britishers. In spite of her repeated assertion that she did not know anything about the two revolts, the imperial rulers said she was guilty (though thirty years later the rulers repented that they had wronged the innocent lady). Helpless, the Rani had to fight the imperial army led by Sir Hugh Rose, and what a fighter she proved to be! She was a lioness. Thousands of her soldiers were killed. Yet, with her adopted child tied to her back, she fought valiantly for days. But treachery made her lose the battle and she escaped to a place called Kalpi. The imperial army followed her. She managed to feed her son somehow and continued her journey on horseback. She reached Gwalior and fought there also. But when her horse died, and another she rode on failed to cross a river, she had none to save her and was killed while fighting. She passed away on 17 June 1858. [Retold from *Indian Freedom Struggle Centenary Souvenir, 1857-1957*.]

Bengal's Contribution to Tibet

King Khri-sron-Ide-btsan (755-97 AD) ruled over several provinces other than Tibet during the 8th century. He was a great patron of Buddhism and made it the state religion in place of Bon (demon worship). He was regarded as an incarnation of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. This king invited Śāntarakṣita, (author of *Tattvasaṃgraha*), the high priest of Nalanda University, to be the high priest of Tibet. Śāntarakṣita, born of a Bengali royal family, came to be called Paṇḍita Bodhisattva or Dharmaśāntighoṣa. He stayed in Tibet till 762 AD. It was Śāntarakṣita who introduced the system of Buddhist monachism, known as Lamaism, in Tibet. He was helped in this onerous task by Padmasambhava, another monk from India (cf. *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, ed. R.C. Mazumdar, pp. 270, 445-6).

A Pilgrimage to the New World

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Swami Smarananandaji is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj has been visiting different places on invitation to deliver lectures and promote the cause of Vedanta. He recently visited the Ramakrishna Order's centres in America. Upon repeated requests, he penned down his feelings and experiences of the tour. This is the tenth and concluding part of the series.

On the morning of 26 June 2000, I left for Syracuse on the way to Thousand Island Park. The plane was delayed due to bad weather and took off only at 11:30 am. I was under the impression that the propeller plane—a very small one with only 19 seats—would go straight to Syracuse. So when it landed after an hour, I thought I had reached Syracuse, though from the sky the place looked too big to be Syracuse! Going inside the airport, my doubt strengthened, and on enquiry I learnt that the airport where the plane landed was Newark International Airport, one of the three airports serving New York City, in the state of New Jersey. I found that my baggage too didn't arrive. Nor could I find Swami Adiswarananda and others who were to receive me and take me to the Thousand Islands. I realized I was in a deep mess.

The lady at the check-in counter told me that the plane that was to take me had already left. Fortunately for me, there was another flight for Syracuse, taking off at 3 pm. The lady was kind enough to give me a seat on it. In the meantime, Swami Adiswarananda had called me and the phone was connected to Gate No. 39, where I was waiting. He said: 'We have received the baggage, but the swami couldn't be found!' Usually it is the other way round—the passenger arrives but the baggage is left behind. Any-

way, I managed to reach Syracuse by 4 pm.

The drive to Thousand Islands Park took 1½ hours. These islands, both small and big, dot the surface of St Lawrence, a mighty river that flows lazily out of Lake Ontario in Canada and drains into the Atlantic, 1000 miles away. Ocean-bound vessels enter the river and go right up to Chicago on Lake Michigan, through lakes Ontario and Erie. Wellesley Island, which is the largest, is the most important island.

In 1895, Swami Vivekananda was giving classes to earnest students in New York, but he was feeling tired with the onset of summer. One of the students, Miss Dutcher, owned a cottage on the St Lawrence River, in Wellesley Island. She invited Swamiji and a few other students to her cottage. Miss S.E. Waldo, one



Thousand Island Park: Miss Dutcher's cottage where Swamiji stayed

of these students, wrote in later life: 'The place was ideally suited, on high ground, overlooking a wide sweep of the beautiful river with many of its far-famed Thousand Islands. ... The cottage stood on the side of a hill, which on the north and the west sloped abruptly down towards the shore of the river.' The trees in front of the cottage have grown thick foliage and so we cannot see the wide expanse of the river from the cottage. Again, 'There, close by his own door sat our beloved teacher every evening during our stay and communed with us who sat silent in the darkness, eagerly drinking in his inspiring words. The place was a veritable sanctuary. ... Not one house of the large village could be seen; it was as if we were in the heart of a dense forest, miles away from the haunts of men.' Swami Vivekananda's inspiring presence here, though 106 years ago, pervades the place. He gave his best, and his disciples drank deep from the fountain of spirituality that Swami Vivekananda's words were.

In 1947, Swami Nikhilananda, the head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York, purchased this property and started his summer retreat. Since then Thousand Island Park has been attracting Vedanta admirers in summer. Swami Adiswarananda, the present head of the Ramakrishna-

Vivekananda Center of New York, comes every summer and spends 10-12 weeks here. Normally the work starts on 1 July, but he kindly opened the cottage one week earlier so as to suit my convenience. Winter is severe here. The river, 7 to 8 miles broad in some places, gets frozen.

Swami Vivekananda stayed here for seven weeks. And it is indeed a place of pilgrimage for Ramakrishna-Vivekananda devotees, for he gave his best here, in an inspired mood. Behind the cottage is a forest, and the trail leads us to some rocks. It is said that on one of those rocks, Swamiji sat for meditation and went into samadhi. The place is spiritually elevating. In summer, the park area attracts a large number of tourists but it does not seem to disturb the peace of the place. I spent three restful nights at Thousand Islands. At the end of a hectic tour my quiet stay here for three nights was really invigorating. Mr Jaime, a friend, took us on a long cruise in his beautiful launch to Clayton, where Swami Vivekananda got off the train and took the boat to Wellesley Island. Mr Jaime took us—Swami Adiswarananda and Swami Vidananda, Peter, Yogesh and myself—near the Canadian border in the midst of the river, and told me, 'Swami, you are now in Canada,' and that without immigration check!

On 29th morning, I had to leave Thousand Islands for San Francisco, changing flight at Washington DC. Swami Adiswarananda, Vidananda, Peter and Mithu bade farewell to me at Syracuse Airport.

SAN FRANCISCO - IV

At Washington DC, Swami Atmajnanananda (Stuart) and Jayanta Sarkar had come with some food. Leaving Washington at 2 pm, I reached San Francisco at 4:45 pm. 30 June 2000 was spent quietly, but utilized for useful discussions with Swami Prabuddhananda.



Ramakrishna Mission, Bartley Road, Singapore

SINGAPORE

Next day (1 July), I left for Singapore at 1 pm. The flight, after an hour's halt at Seoul, South Korea, reached Singapore on 3rd July at 2:30 pm. At such an unearthly hour, Swami Muktirupananda, head of Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore, and others were at the airport. One could easily feel that the Singapore Airport is the best in the world—spacious, beautiful, efficient! The 'No Jet-lag' pills which Swami Prabuddhananda had given me seemed to have worked well, for I had no problem getting sleep.

Our Singapore centre is indeed in a beautiful setting, gradually rising from the road above with a line of elegant buildings. It is the envy of everyone. Apart from ashrama activities, it runs a highly ranked kindergarten and also a boys' home.

Leaving Singapore on 4th evening at 9 pm, I reached Kolkata at 10:30 pm. Thus a useful, educative but hectic tour of the Occident came to an end.

Now a few words about the life in the Occident in today's milieu and about our work in the USA.

After the War of Independence with the British, the United States of America came into existence with 13 states, on the east coast of the central region of North America. Gradually, more states joined the union and now the USA has 50 states with a population of 260 million people.

The Founding Fathers of the USA had set high democratic values—freedom, equality, and justice—as the cornerstones of the new nation. In this regard, Thomas Jefferson needs special mention. It is for this reason that we find a stately memorial dedicated to him in Washington DC. Abraham Lincoln is another venerated person, whose memory is commemorated in various ways besides the grand Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. He is considered the greatest of the American Presidents, for he fought and gave his life for the abolition of slavery, a human degradation.

The settlers in the New World found the

country richly endowed with natural resources: huge fresh-water lakes, mighty rivers, mountains, evergreen forests, minerals of various kinds—all these were there for the asking. One had only to put in hard and systematic work to turn everything to human advantage. And this they did in a big way. As a result, today the USA has become the only superpower in the world. The two World Wars, followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, pushed up the USA to the No. 1 position in the world today.

This is a land of plenty: to help the farmers, overproduction of grains is offset by destroying the surplus grains! Milk, fruits, timber, etc are produced in abundance. We find huge wastage of food, prolific use of wood in construction, and paper for all purposes. Everything possible has been done to make life comfortable and enjoyable.

But America is yet to find its spiritual roots. The rat race goes on—one does not know where to stop. Everyone above 16 years can own a car, and thus the young are on the road immediately on completing 16. The roads, particularly the freeways, are fantastic. Some of them have 10 or even 12 lanes, dotted with oleanders in full bloom on either side and on the kerb (I went there in spring).

The young people are attracted to anything exotic; they go on experimenting. Thus the US today is the most welcome country for anything new. Individual freedom, which is valued most, has given rise to the Women's Lib movement. While it may be right as it goes, one cannot understand why the women should imitate men for the purpose of ascertaining their freedom.

Education is universal. There is opportunity for anyone with the necessary intelligence to qualify himself or herself better. Dignity of labour is something which comes naturally to the people in the West. Here in India, we are yet to learn to accept this.

With all the foregoing good things, there is a dark side. The 'muggers' in big cities make it dangerous to move out after dusk. If you do,

you may lose your money as well as your life. The number of children born out of wedlock is increasing, resulting in the disintegration of the family. This is causing concern to all thinking people in America.

If the USA has to grow into one of the greatest civilizations history has known, it should stop to think where it is going and where it would like to go; not casually, but seriously.

VEDANTA IN THE WEST

Vedanta was introduced to America by Swami Vivekananda in 1893, at the World's Parliament of Religions. Of course, the New England sages—Emerson, Thoreau, and Walt Whitman—knew the *Bhagavadgita* already. But with Swami Vivekananda's active preaching in the USA for three years, Vedanta got a firm foothold. The first Vedanta Society was established in New York in 1894. Since then, swamis have been regularly preaching in the western hemisphere, and new Vedanta Societies came to be established in various parts of the USA. The congregation also grew. In the first decade of this century, the intelligentsia were attracted to the universal ideas of Vedanta. Its message of freedom and its emphasis on the individual were welcome.

World War II and the later decades saw a sharp turn towards eastern religions. Buddhism, with Zen in the frontline, yoga of vari-

ous shades, and exotic creeds bending religion to worldly pursuits, drew away a good number of would-be Vedanta aspirants. This, no doubt, made the work difficult for traditional preachers of Vedanta. The West asks for something practical, something that would yield results immediately and could be demonstrated.

Nevertheless, it goes to the credit of Vedanta that for more than a century it has been holding its ground, and progressing slowly but steadily. It is not like one of the mushrooming cults that appears suddenly like a meteor in the skies and disappears with equal speed. However, preachers of Vedanta need to attract the younger generation, who emphasize practicality. So philosophy is to be supported by practical methods of meditation and mind culture.

The message of Vedanta is thousands of years old. It has held its own against innumerable vicissitudes, because of its universal character. These truths have been vindicated in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Therefore we can reasonably hope that Vedanta in the West will open up new pathways for leading humanity forward towards a higher goal of life. □

What is the Human Being?

Man is an infinite spring, coiled up in a small box, and that spring is trying to unfold itself; and all the social phenomena that we see is the result of this trying to unfold. All the competition and struggles and evils that we see around us are neither the causes of these unfoldments, nor the effects. As one of our great philosophers says—in the case of the irrigation of a field, the tank is somewhere upon a higher level, and the water is trying to rush into the field, and is barred by a gate. But as soon as the gate is opened, the water rushes in by its own nature; and if there is dust and dirt in the way, the water rolls over them. But dust and dirt are neither the result nor the cause of this unfolding of the divine nature of man. They are co-existent circumstances, and, therefore, can be remedied.

—Swami Vivekananda

Advaita Philosophy and the 'Dharma Ideal'

SWAMI TATTWAMAYANANDA

Swami Tattwamayananandaji is Editor, Prabuddha Keralam (Malayalam), a scholarly monthly of the Ramakrishna Order. Tattwamayananandaji has been delivering lectures at important venues in and outside Kerala, and his articles are read with deep interest. In the following article, the swamiji discusses the 'dharma ideal' with Advaita as the background.

Some western scholars have tried to portray Hindu religion as a cold, lifeless, rigid metaphysical system, which is completely indifferent towards the ethical principles that should guide our daily life. According to them, Hindu religion and philosophy present an amoral attitude towards practical life, or is quiet towards ethical values.

Hindu philosophy is not indifferent towards moral principles guiding human life; not only that, it contains the most sublime ethical and moral tenets. The Vedāntic concepts of the spiritual oneness of existence, the whole world being one spiritual family (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*), individuals being essentially the very embodiments of purity and morality, and the concepts of dharma and karma, all provide a solid foundation for a great ethical philosophy, which is universal in dimension. This is all the more relevant today when a global approach is becoming more and more popular and acceptable in all spheres of life.

Conventional morality is usually based on certain social obligations and established rules of conduct, consisting of *vidhi* and *nisedha* (do's and don'ts). From a theological point of view, it is chiefly based on the fear of God. But Advaitic ethics is based on the metaphysical principles which say that morality is an expression of the Atman. A man's moral life is good in proportion to the level of his spiritual progress and his own understanding of his true nature. A man commits an error because he is not aware of his own true nature. In the Vedāntic tradition, as Swami Vivekananda points out, it is the individual

that is supreme and evolution or spiritual progress is nothing but the gradual unfoldment of the essential spirituality of man. This idea of rotation applies not only to the spiritual life of the individual but also to the phenomena of world-time as well. The unseen power which rhythmically regulates the origin, existence, dissolution and movements of the cosmic phenomena, and which is often called *ṛta* (often interpreted as *yajña* by Sāyana) in Vedic literature, is actually following the ideal of dharma at the cosmic level. When a person becomes aware of his true spiritual nature, he abstains from evil deeds of his own will and not out of fear of a supreme authority, such as the king or God. He becomes completely unselfish. That was why Swami Vivekananda defined morality as 'unselfishness'. Swamiji said: 'The only definition that can be given of morality is this: that which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.'¹

According to Advaita Vedānta, God is the Indweller in all living beings, and the ethical and spiritual evolution of an individual depends upon the degree of the manifestation of this divinity or godliness. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā* (10.20):

*Aham-ātmā gudākeśa
sarva-bhūtāśaya-sthitah;
Aham-ādiśca madhyam ca
bhutānām-anta eva ca.*

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 1, p. 110.

O Arjuna, I am the Self, existent in the heart of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings.

Great stress is laid on moral conduct as a preparatory step to spiritual progress in all the various systems of thought and belief-systems of India. In other words, ethical values come first in the process of spiritual progress.

Ethics, whatever may be its philosophical definition, is, in actual practice, the high or ideal conduct between two human beings and between an individual and society. In our Indian tradition, all ethical values are ultimately based on spirituality or spiritual experience.

In other words, the Vedāntic ethical philosophy is founded on the principle of the spiritual unity or oneness of creation and dharma; the bedrock of Indian culture is its expression in our daily life. Like several metaphysical concepts of Hindu religion, dharma also is too subtle a concept for definition. It is simple to a person who practises it, but it is almost incomprehensible to those who do not practise it. That is why the ancient teachers proclaimed that dharma can be properly understood only by following the path of great people who have practised it.

Dharma is the stabilizing influence in all spheres of individual as well as collective life. Vālmīki says that dharma is so called because nothing else sustains the world so well as the conviction in it, and its pursuit.

*Dhāranāt dharma ityāhuḥ
dharmena vidhrtāḥ prajāḥ;
Yasmāt dhārayate sarvaṁ
trailokyam sacarācam.*

Though the word 'dharma' is variously interpreted to mean law, convention, practice prevalent in society, custom, the totality of human virtues, moral values, ethics and so on; it is in a sense the totality of all these. This supreme ethical ideal is, perhaps, one of the greatest contributions of India to the world. Dharma has two broad divisions, namely *pravṛtti dharma* and *niṛtti dharma*. *Pravṛtti dharma* is dealt with in the sacrificial portion (*karma kāṇḍa*) of the Vedas, and is a pursuit of

life which enables the individual to live a happy life in this world while performing actions, and caring for duties and responsibilities in his domestic, social and national life. *Niṛtti dharma*, dealt with in the Upaniṣadic portion of the Vedic literature, is a pursuit to make us understand the unity of the Spirit which transcends the conventions and laws of domestic and social life. *Pravṛtti dharma* is divided into two, special (*viśeṣa*) dharma and ordinary (*sāmānya*) dharma. Special dharma denotes the performance of duties by people relevant to their particular position in life, whereas general dharma includes the virtues of character and good conduct such as non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, cleanliness, control of the senses, charity, forgiveness, compassion, simplicity, absence of greed, etc.

Dharma is, thus, a multidimensional concept, which has kept intact our national culture and civilization over the centuries, in spite of innumerable foreign invasions and other national tragedies. Thus dharma is a sublime form of spiritual humanism, with a universal outlook. It has also provided a solid ethical foundation for Indian culture. If Advaita provides the philosophical foundation of Hindu ethics, the ideal of dharma provides the shape of its practical application.

Dharma—the Ideal of Advaitic Humanism

Though, technically, Advaita seeks to free an aspirant from the burden of social obligations, it is not indifferent towards the moral principles that guide our social life. It does not go against ethical values. Rather, it transcends the rigid uncompromising rules of social morality. It is, in other words, beyond ethics.

Dharma, on the other hand, is the ideal of Advaitic humanism, the ethical form of Advaitic philosophy. An ordinary man living in the modern world has to work hard for wealth and other material gains (*artha* and *kāma*). But Hindu philosophy lays down that, while pursuing these twin goals, one should never deviate from the path of dharma. If one pursues the path of material prosperity, never deviating from the ideal of dharma, a stage is

reached when he becomes aware of the transitory nature of material gains. Then he looks for something which is imperishable and eternal, and asks the question: 'What lies beyond these perishable transitory phenomena?' Then he begins to seek *mokṣa* or the fourth *puruṣārtha*.

Most of the problems we are facing today are caused by the blind pursuit of *artha* and *kāma*, deviating from the path of dharma. The craze for wealth at any cost, urbanization, westernization, mechanization, and the consequent 'de-humanization' of life leave us incapable of enjoying the fruits of our own labours. This situation can be altered only by upholding the ideal of dharma with Advaitic humanism as its background.

Dharma teaches us to transcend the very distinction between dharma and *adharma*. To a person who has reached the highest stage of evolution in the pursuit of the ideal of dharma, morality, truth and other virtues become natural elements of his character. He naturally follows the path of dharma. Therefore he need not necessarily discriminate between virtue and vice. That is why the *Mahābhārata* says:

*Tyaja dharmam-adharmam ca
ubhe satyānrte tyaja;
Ubhe satyānrte tyaktvā
yena tyajasi tat tyaja.*

Without the active support of the dharma-ideal bhakti degenerates into fatalism, jnana becomes dry metaphysics and karma becomes mere workaholism.

It was this high ideal of life that enabled ancient Indian culture to survive centuries of foreign invasion and political slavery. Except for the Jews, perhaps, there is no nation in the world that has suffered as much as India from foreign invasions. But, whereas other civilizations like the Babylonian, Graeco-Roman, Assyrian, Egyptian and several others have vanished from the face of earth long ago and are to be found only in history books and museums, living examples of ancient Indian heritage can be seen in our own times. This is because, unlike ancient Greece which adored the cult of

efficiency in material life, and Rome which idolized social law and order, India worshipped the ideal of dharma which enabled society to have both material prosperity as well as spiritual progress. It was this ideal of dharma which gave Indian culture its global dimension.

Advaita philosophy, along with dharma in its applied form, is the only foundation for the basic unity of all religions, cultures and ways of life. The root cause of most of the miseries and persecutions perpetuated in the name of religion was owing to man's inability to recognize the fact that though the ultimate goal may be One, approaches to that goal can be many; and different religions are only so many different dimensions of the same dharma ideal.

Dharma and Yajña

The uniqueness of the dharma ideal as a moral philosophy becomes all the more revealing when we compare it with some of the parallel streams of thought in western philosophy, especially the teachings of the so-called European moralists. Take, for example, Aristotle's concept of *Theoria*, which he wants all people to imitate. According to him, human beings should regard this as their ideal, and our mind will reach this level through contemplation. In the moralist ideas of a philosopher like Nietzsche we come across the very antithesis of what we call morality in the Indian tradition. A close examination of the moral teachings of philosophers like Sedgwick and Herbert Spencer will show that the Hindu concept of dharma includes in its scope what Spencer calls the relative as well as absolute ethics. As for the teachings of Immanuel Kant, it's obvious that his categorical imperative, which he considers as the very criterion of human conduct, forms but one aspect of what Śrī Kṛṣṇa called *svadharma* in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

The highest form of dharma is the practice of *svadharma* as *yajña* which, on the one hand, takes man to God and, on the other, allows him to live a happy and peaceful life in

this world. We know that everything in this world follows certain unseen laws. Dharma, in its cosmic form, is the totality of all these invisible laws.

Yajña in its preliminary sense is interpreted as the sacrifice of any perishable object for propitiating God.² If we elevate the word *yajña* from its purely ritualistic sense, we will find that dharma, *ṛta* and *yajña* constitute all that is holy and great in Hindu religious tradition. *Yajña* in its most sublime sense can mean any action which is of the noblest nature.³ This unique concept of unselfish action with a noble motive behind has to be understood against the statement in the *Bhagavadgītā* where Kṛṣṇa says that the knowledge of Brahman is the supreme *yajña*. *Yajña* in its most common and simple form is nothing but an at-

tempt, through our actions, to follow the regulative principle behind the whole existence, ie dharma.

In modern times the ideal of dharma can bring about a synthesis between tradition and modernity, between science and spirituality (religion), between reason and faith, and between the occidental and oriental values of life. This global outlook at the cultural level leads to harmony and synthesis and can well lead to the emergence of a new paradigm of life. □

2. *Devatoddeśena dravyasya tyago yajñah* —*Kātyāyana Śrauta-sūtra-vyākhyā*, 1.22.

3. *Yajño vai śreṣṭhataram karma* —*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.1.57.

The Greatness of India

Another great characteristic of Indian society as compared with Western, is the much higher civilization and refinement of the lower orders. It is difficult for the European mind to recognize this fact under the mask of that grinding poverty which is so apparent here. The Occidental conception of social development concerns itself much with labour and with letters, and more or less presupposes a condition of material prosperity. That is to say, we are not able to detach the idea of the thing itself from that form of it which we have happened to produce. But if we drive the question of the ultimate significance of civilization home, we shall all, I think, unite to acknowledge that it lies in a habit of self-restraint, in that which lifts man above the brute, rather in any special series of phenomena. ... Hindu culture is, in fact, like a gigantic tree which is constantly embracing a wider and wider area with its roots. Through the ages, this huge organism has been at work, silently reclaiming more and more of humanity from barbarism. Perhaps each successive stratum won may have been a new caste taken in. Religious notions would seem to be the first great unifying nerves sent out. Then follow, though in what order I cannot guess, various accretions of custom, till by degrees appear the old gentleness, the old self-direction, and the old horror of defilement.

As one looks at modern India, therefore, one feels that in the womanly touch (of the mother) on the individual and on home life lies the pivotal point of its being.

—*Sister Nivedita in a letter to Prabuddha Bharata*
(cf. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 1, p. 283)

Swami Abhedananda and His Mission

SWAMI ATMABODHANANDA

Swami Atmabodhananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Kolkata, founded by Swami Abhedananda. In this article, he studies the contributions of Swami Abhedananda to the intellectual and spiritual world.

Swami Abhedananda was one of the apostles of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and a beloved spiritual brother of the great Swami Vivekananda. He was born on 2 October 1866, at Ahiritola, North Calcutta, and was known as Kaliprasad Chandra in his premonastic days.

Kaliprasad, a deeply religious soul since his boyhood, had yearned for spiritual progress. He grew a desire to be a philosopher like Sankaracharya. One day, hearing a lecture on Patanjali's yoga philosophy by the great Sanskrit scholar Sasadhar Tarkachudamani, he felt the need for a yogi to teach him yoga. So he began searching for such a preceptor. His heart's desire was fulfilled when he met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna at once recognized the great spiritual possibilities in him and exclaimed with joy: 'My son, you were a great yogi in your previous birth. This is your last birth. Yes, I will teach you yoga.'¹ Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch and initiation transformed Kaliprasad's life. He began to see gods and

goddesses in spiritual visions. He spent most of his time in philosophical studies and spiritual practices according to the instructions of his great Master. And, by the grace of his Master, he attained the highest state of spiritual experience, ie God-consciousness or samadhi, in no time.



Swami Abhedananda

Kaliprasad left home for good to serve Sri Ramakrishna during the latter's last illness, first at Shyampukur and then at the Cossipore garden house. After Sri Ramakrishna's demise on 16 August 1886, he became a monk along with his other spiritual brothers. Upon his initiation into sannyasa, he was given the name Swami Abhedananda by his senior spiritual brother, Swami Vivekananda.

While living at the Baranagore Math, which was established soon after

the passing away of the Master, he composed beautiful Sanskrit hymns extolling the glory of Sri Ramakrishna and his divine consort, Sri Sarada Devi. When Holy Mother heard these hymns, she was very pleased and blessed him with these words: 'May the Goddess of Learning, Saraswati, sit on your tongue.'² How prophetic Holy Mother's words were was amply proved when Swami

1. Swami Abhedananda, *Amar Jiban-katha* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1983), Vol. 1, p. 23. [Hereafter, *Amar Jiban-katha*.]

2. *Amar Jiban-katha*, p. 111.

Abhedananda subsequently appeared on the world scene as a representative of Sanatana Dharma. He started out on a countrywide journey, travelling barefoot all over India from the Himalayas to Rameshwaram. His itinerant life lasted for nearly ten years, during which period he never touched money as he had vowed.

Receiving a call from Swami Vivekananda to help him in the West, Abhedananda sailed for London in August 1896. There he delivered his maiden speech at the Christo-Theological Society at Bloomsbury Square on 27 October 1896, the subject chosen by him being the philosophy of the *Panchadasi*. Swami Vivekananda was so pleased to hear his address that he declared before the audience with joy: 'Even if I perish out of this plane, my message will be sounded through these dear lips and the world will hear it.'³ Captain Sevier, a disciple of Vivekananda, also said: 'Swami Abhedananda is a born speaker; wherever he will go he will have success.'⁴

During his stay in London for about a year, Abhedananda came to be acquainted with Prof Max Mueller, Prof Paul Deussen and many other scholars of the time. From London, Abhedananda, at the request of Swamiji, went over to New York to make his headquarters there, and took charge of the Vedanta Society in August 1897. He was soon able to establish a permanent headquarters for the Vedanta Society in the city of New York. On his second visit to America in 1899, Vivekananda was so pleased to see this headquarters that he remarked: 'Thrice I knocked at the door of New York but it did not respond. I am glad that you have established a permanent headquarters. This is the first time I have found our own house in New York.'⁵

Swami Abhedananda had remarkably

adapted himself to the conditions of American life and was able to win the admiration, love and support of the Americans with his lectures on 'Vedanta Philosophy', 'India and Her People', and others. With the passage of time, Abhedananda's fame as a scholar, philosopher and religious teacher spread far and wide. His popularity grew more and more. Abhedananda founded a highly informative monthly mouthpiece from the Vedanta Society of New York, named *Vedanta Monthly Bulletin*, and edited it for more than eight years. At least 6000 copies were sold each month.

Swami Abhedananda's first published book was *Reincarnation*, which came out in 1898. In this book, Abhedananda answers these questions: Wherefrom are we here? And where are we to go hereafter? Did we ever exist before this birth? Shall we continue to exist after death or perish for ever? Abhedananda has established the truth of pre-existence, rebirth and immortality of the human soul from the standpoint of the teachings of Vedanta. His various other books also commanded the absorbing attention of the thoughtful and well-educated readers residing in various parts of the world. Some of these books are: *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Panchadasi*, *Attitude of Vedanta Towards Religion*, *Doctrine of Karma*, *Divine Heritage of Man*, *Great Saviours of the World*, *How to be a Yogi*, *Human Affection and Divine Love*, *Ideal of Education*, *Life Beyond Death*, *Mystery of Death*, and others.

Swami Abhedananda's charming personality and profound spirituality secured for him many admirers and friends from the enlightened sections of American society. Professors William Jackson, Lanman, Howison, and William James; Robert Ingersoll and many intellectuals and professors of Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, Berkeley, Yale and other universities; all had established friendly relations with him. Abhedananda had an inter-

3. Swami Abhedananda, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Panchadasi* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1984), p. 5.

4. *Amar Jiban-katha* (1984), Vol. 2, p. 8.

5. Moni Bagchi, *Swami Abhedananda: A Spiritual Biography* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1968), p. 294.

view with McKinley, the then President of the USA, who gave him a very cordial reception. He was also for a time an honoured guest of Dr Elmer Gates, a famous scientist and psychologist of America at that time. He also came to be acquainted with Prof Josiah Royce, Rev R.H. Newton and Edison, the inventor. The great inventor made a present of a gramophone machine of his own invention to Abhedananda. It is still there at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Kolkata, as a souvenir. In the midst of his busy work schedule in America, Abhedananda made it a point to make periodic visits to Europe to consolidate the base of the Vedanta movement in that continent, having crossed the Atlantic as many as seventeen times in the process.

In 1906, he paid a short visit to India. He was hailed as the patriot-saint of India. Abhedananda made his triumphal march all over India. During these seven months he delivered many thoughtful and impressive addresses in the reception meetings, held in various cities and towns in his honour. He gave a clarion call to the people in general, and the student community in particular, to build their character standing on the bedrock of spirituality. In the end of the same year Abhedananda again sailed for America.

From 1896 to 1921, spanning a full quarter of a century, Abhedananda worked in the West, spreading India's religious and cultural ideas and also the universal message of his great Master. He was one of the best representatives of India's universal religion and culture in modern times. As for Abhedananda's views on religion and philosophy, he said: 'Religion is not a set of dogmas, doctrines, creed, belief, ceremonials and rituals.'⁶ He has defined religion as the realization of Truth in its fullness. His views on religion and philoso-

phy were fully in conformity with the theories and discoveries of modern science. He observed: 'Twentieth century is the age of science. Science never accepts anything which is not based upon reason. The religion of this century therefore should be a religion that runs in harmony with science. This religion of scientific spirit and principles can surely be found in the universal ideal of Vedanta.'

Swami Abhedananda finally returned to India in 1921, starting out from the West Coast of America via the Hawaii Islands in the Pacific and several Far Eastern countries where too he delivered lectures before learned audiences in different cities such as Honolulu, Kuala Lumpur, Rangoon, etc. Even at the age of 56, in the year 1922, he undertook a strenuous journey to Kashmir and Tibet, and discovered many interesting facts about the unknown period of Jesus Christ's life from an old manuscript preserved in the Hemis Monastery in Ladakh.

He established two centres in India, one in Calcutta, called Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, and another, Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, in Darjeeling. He loved activity and was a great karma yogi. He could not tolerate laziness.

On the occasion of the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna, a parliament of religions was convened at the Town Hall in Calcutta in 1937, and as the last surviving disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Abhedananda presided. This was his last public appearance. This dynamic disciple of Ramakrishna passed away from this mortal plane on 8 September 1939 at Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta, entering the abode of eternal life and light at the holy feet of his great Master, Sri Ramakrishna. □

6. Swami Abhedananda, *Universal Religion and Vedanta* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1968), p. 23.

7. Swami Abhedananda, *Religion of the Twentieth Century* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1968), p. 23.

Discipline

AJAHN SUCITTO

Venerable Ajahn Sucitto is the president of Chithurst Forest Monastery at Hampshire, UK. Here is a Buddhist reflection on discipline, based on one of venerable Sucitto's talks.

The words discipline and disciple come from the Latin word meaning, 'to know'. A disciple, then, is someone who follows a discipline, someone who really wants to know. That desire to know is so strong that it creates a certain form in their life. This is the Buddhist understanding of discipline as compared to military discipline which is a way of not knowing, of making sure that you do not know what is going on and preventing you from questioning or investigating at all.

The Buddhist attitude to discipline is that you want to know something, not in an idealistic way but from a practical point of view. Discipline is, in a way, a transformation of idealism into a practical path. When you really want to understand life, you have to take hold of it very firmly and be able to hold it steady and look at it clearly: life as you live it, your own consciousness, your reactions, responses, perceptions, and thoughts. Hold them steady and look at them. Then you can see whether each one is worthy or useful, what it is about, and what its results are.

Discipline in Buddhist practice is intended to make life more available for reflection. When we hold something steady, then we can use it for reflection—rather like holding a mirror steady. If we constantly think about our thoughts, having opinions about

our feelings and ideas about how they should be, this is not reflection. Rather, it is creating more of the very stuff that we are trying to understand. It is not that we are against thoughts, feelings, and impulses—but in order to understand these, we need to hold them

in a steady and silent way; only then can we look and see how they affect us. This is the essence of what Buddhist discipline is and what reflection means.

Buddhism is a reflective teaching. It asks us to reflect on the state of the body, on old age, sickness and death. We reflect on our kamma. We reflect on loving kindness. These are all Buddhist reflections meaning that we hold the mind steady, allow one of these themes to enter and then see what happens.

When we use the body for reflection, we keep the mind steady and allow ourselves to witness the feelings in the body, the weight, the

warmth or the energies that flow around it. We can also reflect upon the mind. When we reflect on a teaching, we listen and see what happens when we hear that teaching. We do not listen in order to believe it or to become convinced or indoctrinated by it. As we listen, we do not think, 'I am not going to accept that. You cannot make me believe that.' So we are not entering an argument, but rather holding that mind steady, letting the teaching go into it



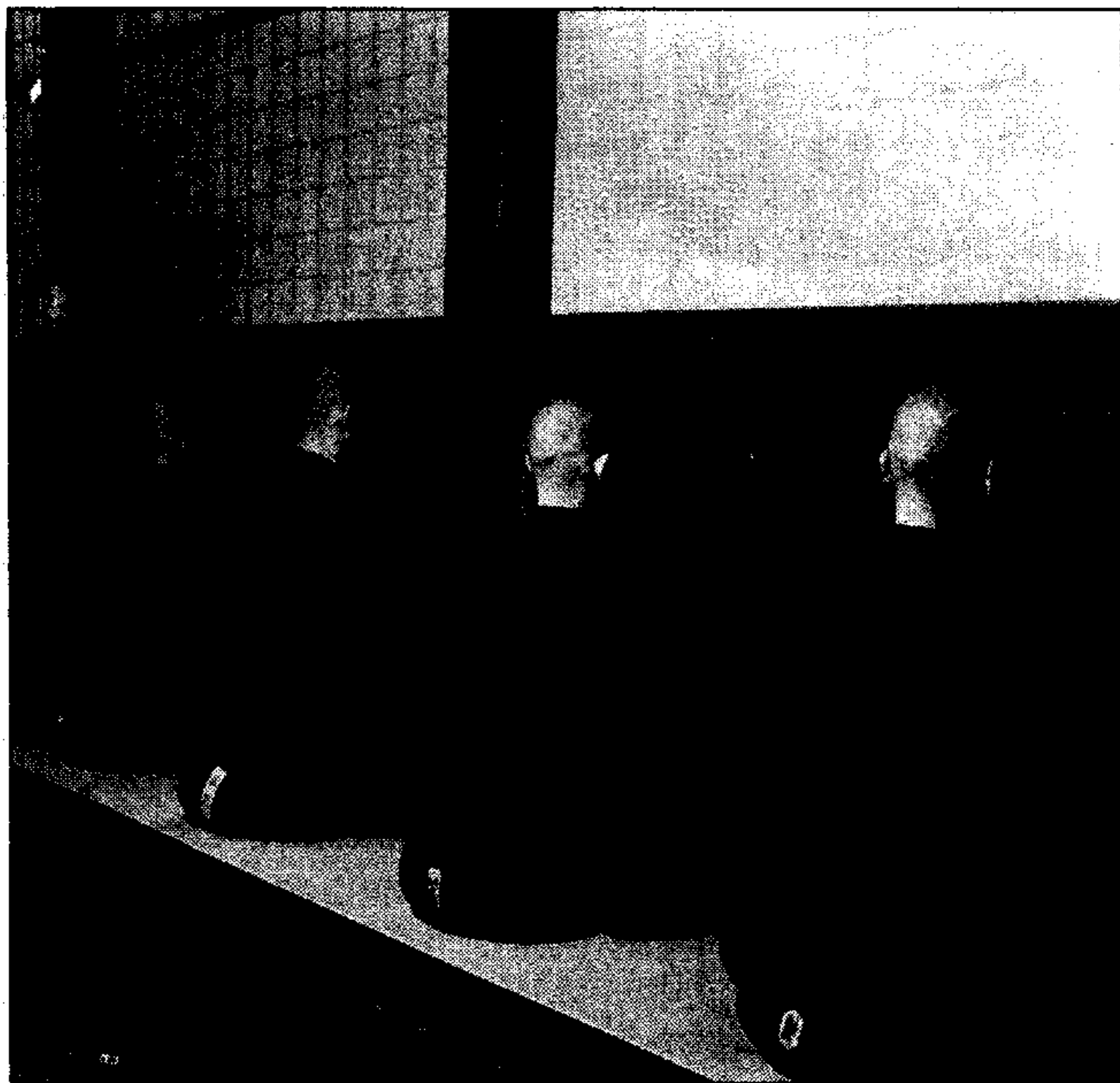
Lord Buddha

and then seeing what happens. There may be understanding or not, approval, disapproval or whatever. This is what reflection is about. One of the fundamental disciplines is the discipline that enables us to be still and not need to find answers to prove anything. To not need to have an opinion requires a mental or spiritual discipline. This could be called the discipline of awakening because in order to awaken, we have to be free from opinions.

The Buddha's enlightenment was based upon reviewing many of the ideas and assumptions that are made about the spiritual path. For example, we may assume that we have to get away from the sensory world or that we must stop our thoughts, and that in this way we will transcend the sense world. These are assumptions we make about the spiritual path if we have never applied a discipline of reflection using our thoughts, feelings and sensory experiences as objects. We have never really managed just to be still with these, and so they have become obstacles to our practice. We constantly react, get caught up or reject our sensory experience. When we feel anger, we either repress it or act upon it; we do not ever reflect on it.

As long as our subconscious or conditioned habit is to constantly engage with thoughts and sensory experience, we have no ability to contemplate or reflect. We therefore assume that these things have to be pushed away or changed in some way. Even the idea of meditation or of discipline seems to us basically an annihilation, a 'getting rid of', because we have not had the inner strength to be still with life as it flows through us. We always feel that if something is flowing, we are either going to get swept away by it or else we have to stop it.

But the Buddha's Middle Path is a more



Monastic discipline: Monks in meditation

subtle kind of discipline. It is not the discipline to control, it is a discipline that comes from the desire to know, to really know clearly. What is this actually about? What is happiness? What is unhappiness? What is pleasure? Have we become frightened of pleasure or pain or discomfort, blame or worry?

The Buddha had developed a great deal of self-discipline through the desire to control things: so to a certain extent, that can be a skillful practice. At first, perhaps we need to cultivate self-respect and strength of mind by determining to reject and renounce certain things and almost push ourselves into situations that we do not want to go into but that we feel will enhance our practice. This is often the beginning. We have to establish our independence. We use resolution to do retreats, to commit ourselves to compassionate action. The blessing of such a practice is that we can eventually grow from a discipline based upon control and move towards a higher discipline, based upon understanding, upon wanting to know. What is anger, or greed, or craving;

what is existence about? That leads to reflection.

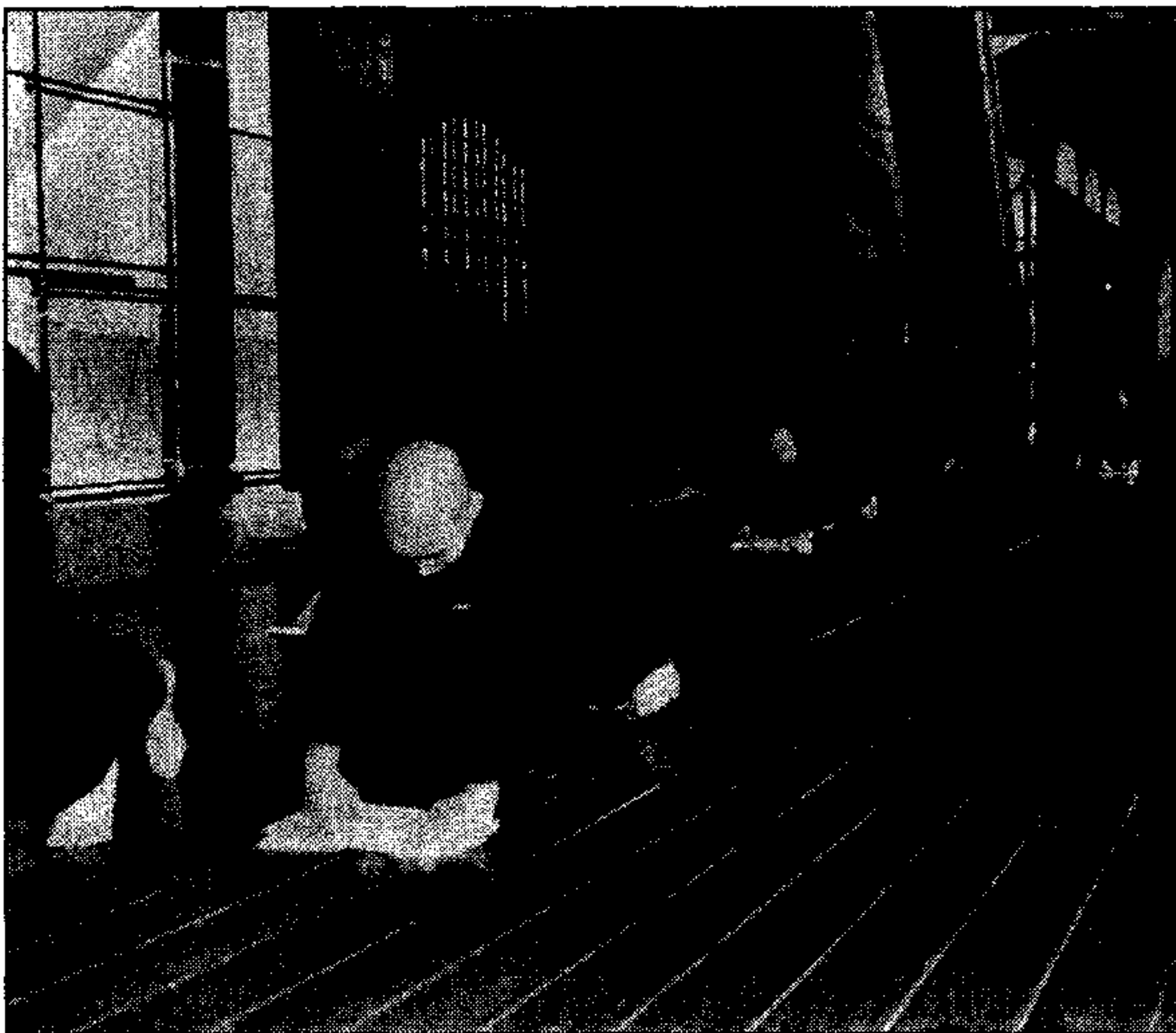
It must always be remembered that the Buddha called his teachings *Dhamma-Vinaya*, *vinaya* being the training or, as it is sometimes called, the discipline. This training is not just a forceful thing, it is a way of cultivating skilful action by which we can transform our lives into something like a craft. Calligraphy, wood carving and pottery are disciplines. In each you have to have a certain clarity and ability to work within the limitations of your instruments and to know them thoroughly so that you do not blot or blur the lines in the writing, split the wood, or cause cracks in the clay. *Dhamma-Vinaya* is like that. It gives a sense of being clearly conscious of what is suitable, correct and skilful and what is uninformed, casual or unskilful use of body, speech or mind.

The forest monasteries where meditation is developed and lived to a very high degree are also places of very strong discipline, not just in moral terms, but also in the way things are done. Things are done in clearly prescribed ways. The emphasis on the training is so that we are attentive to and use every moment of life. We use the form in our daily rou-

tines as a way to hold the mind steady and watch. When we bow, for example, in one particular way, we are not doing it casually or unconsciously, we have a certain attentiveness to it and then we look within that. What is happening? How do we feel? Then we notice if we feel resistance or unwillingness, eagerness, impatience or whatever. Within that, we can also recognize that it does not matter what we are feeling or how we are judging our thoughts and feelings; these feelings are just experiences that come and go and that we let happen. We reach this vantage point by having a discipline to enable life to pass through us and then to learn. What is it like to feel boredom? Is it helpful or not? Do we act upon it, do we believe in it, or are we able to let it go and re-establish a sense of clarity and attention to what we are doing?

I found myself, after some years of practising meditation, studying a little bit, reading a little bit and think quite a lot, not actually having anything that I really had a commitment to. I was living as a monk, but even living as a monk within the discipline was not a moment-by-moment commitment because most of the time I was actually just sitting around. What I needed and found very helpful was a training in doing things in the right way, in looking after the simple requisites that I had. As a monk, I have to fold my robes in a certain way. I cannot just fling them off and dump them on the floor when I get back to my room like I used to do with my clothes when I was a student.

I have to clean my room every day, or rather any room, because a monk does not actually have a room. For a monk, a room is just a lodging, a temporary place. Even if we have been there ten years, it is still only one night at a time. When we go somewhere else, that is our room for one night or two hours or however long. We are supposed to treat each place that we dwell in with the same attitude: to keep it clean and tidy it



Monastic discipline: Monks mopping the floor



Monks preparing food

up properly, not thinking, 'Oh, this is somebody else's house; they will do it for me.'

I must look after my alms bowl. Before I receive food, I always clean the bowl and make sure there are no tiny creatures in it. Then I have to receive food in a special way. I have to come up so that we are really quite close to each other and then someone actually puts it either into my hands or into my bowl. I have to receive it looking at the bowl, not having a conversation with them but actually holding the bowl still and looking into it. It is a very attentive action. When I have finished my alms round, I have to empty the food out, share it with other people, eat what I need and then wash the bowl immediately—not leave it floating in the sink for three hours—wash it immediately and carefully, dry it properly and then store it in such a way that it is neither on a hard surface and nor in a place where it could fall over and be damaged.

These are just little items of a monk's discipline. They are not hard; they are actually quite beautiful. I have found that having to be attentive to things like that means that I cannot just get caught up with my own brooding mind. Training in this way, being attentive to circumstances around me and respecting things in a certain way, means that I cannot

just get lost in thoughts, moods, and feelings. I have to keep awake to what is going on. This is the traditional way, the monk's way, and it is actually very useful.

I have noticed that this training of the mind helps one to develop beyond the training itself. Much of life in our society is dealing with things like equipment, tools, cars, houses, clothes and so on. Things actually have their own nature, their own way of working, and we have to learn how they work. We cannot kick a machine and expect it to work. If we do not train in any way, we tend to break things or use them in the wrong way. We always have workshops in monasteries and there is a whole training in how to use the tools properly. People tend to use tools and not clean them or put them away or to use them wrongly because they want to do a particular thing but they do not really want to understand how the tool works. We do not want to know that we have got to hold a tool gently or wait for it to warm up, that we have got to hold it in a certain way since otherwise it will not cut properly, or that we cannot cut nails with saws. If there is a nail in the wood, we have to stop and take it out. The impatience in our mind will say, 'Give me the machine and just bash through,' and this, of course, never really works. We always end up breaking something or hurting ourselves.

Discipline and reflection work together like this and, gradually, this is the way of clearing the mind. The mind eventually becomes just attentive, caring, able to give and to focus on the present moment without adding thoughts about how things should or should not be. All that inner turmoil stops because we have not believed in it, involved ourselves with it, fought with it, cursed it or adopted it. This is the way for enlightenment, for clarity—discipline and reflection—and there is a craft to it. □

Self-Surrender

AN UNKNOWN SAINT

We publish selections from A Saint's Call to Mankind, edited by Sri M.M. Varma. Dr S. Radhakrishnan has written the foreword to this book. The saint himself has preferred to remain incognito, though a later edition of the book says that the saint was blind, and was a shy monk who liked to remain hidden. His name was Saradananda.

Self-surrender is the key to God-realization: it is the strength of the weak, the life of the *sadhaka*, the final effort and the trump card of the devotee, the sheet anchor of the theist, the unfailing medicine for the sorrow-stricken, the prayer of the fallen. Self-surrender gives strength to the weak, vouchsafes *siddhi* to the *sadhaka*, the Beloved to the lover, God to His devotee, happiness to the server, holiness to the sinner, freedom to the bound one, immortality to mortal man.

Every man surrenders himself to someone. The only difference is that the theist surrenders to the One and the materialist surrenders himself to the many; the former fulfils his real want and the latter runs after innumerable shadows of desires. Real want once fulfilled ceases to be, whereas desires arise again and again.

Self-surrender is an attitude of the mind, which exalts the 'I' of the devotee. It is not any particular form of action. Nor is the feeling 'I am His' a matter of practice. It is a *bhava*. Once it is enthroned in the heart, it sprouts forth into all such sadhana or actions as necessary, even as a seed once sown sprouts into a tree in due course. Prior to self-surrender the 'I' of man remains a bundle of desires. Self-surrender dissolves all desires into one desire. Then the man who has surrendered himself to God may seem to others to be performing many actions; but they are only like the acting on a stage for the benefit of the world. His inner life is one-pointed.

No mother, even in our world, denies her uncleanest child her love. Surely if we rush into the Lord's bosom as His children, He will not refuse to own us. The grace of the Lord is not less than the might of the Ganges which washes off all the dirt in its way.

If you surrender yourself wholly and completely to the Lord, you need not even worry about your progress on the path. Have complete faith in the Lord. ... The devotee who has surrendered to God looks to no one except his Lord for the fulfilment of his own wants, though he fulfils the wants of others, acting for a while as an ideal friend, an ideal son, an ideal father, an ideal husband, an ideal wife, an ideal unit of society, and so on.

'I am His' is the *maha-mantra* for the devotee, which resolves or dissolves all his problems by God's omnipotent grace.

Such a devotee (who surrenders himself) does not have to wait for God, but God awaits him.

It is only when one exhausts one's sense of gratification from the consciousness of one's service to fellow-beings, activities, fame, etc that one is able to surrender oneself to God. Till one is able to surrender oneself, one should constantly and earnestly pray to God to give him the capacity for complete surrender. After turning his face to God and becoming entirely His, there are no more obligations for the devotee to discharge. By right action all propensity for egoistic action dies by itself. □

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

Maharaj, the spiritual treasure which Sri Ramakrishna has handed over to Swami Vivekananda, and has spread through the medium of Swami Vivekananda, has not become so widespread even after a hundred years; why is this so?

The number of aspirants who really and sincerely yearn for spiritual life is extremely less. Amongst those who have taken to the spiritual path, only one or two have reached the goal. As the *Gītā* [7.3] says:

Manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu

kaścid yatati siddhaye;

Yatatāmapī siddhānām

kaścin-mām vetti tattvataḥ.

Amongst the thousands and thousands of people, occasionally a few try to attain the knowledge of the Self; and amongst these few, rarely does one or two reach the goal.

So you can imagine the situation, reading the *Gītā*. What the Upaniṣads say is only an echo of this truth:

Śravaṇāyā'pi bahubhir-yo na labhyaḥ

śṛṇvanto'pi bahavo yaṁ na vidyuh;

Āścāryo vaktā kuśalo'sya labdhā

āścāryo jñātā kuśalānuśiṣṭaḥ.

[—*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.7.]

Śrī Rāma, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Bhagavān Buddha—so many avatars have come from time to time. Keeping their ideals before him, if the human being struggles with steadfastness, then alone can he reach the goal; not otherwise.

In the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and Purāṇas there are so many lives of saints and sages

mentioned. The Truth has been realized in the lives of so many spiritual aspirants since thousands of years. So we should not give up sadhana, thinking that God is impossible to reach.

Swami Vivekananda has declared that the Satya Yuga has begun with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. The world cannot be bettered all in a day. And it is also not true that bad people are to be found only in this age of the four, Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali. Good and bad are there always. It is true that Sri Ramakrishna has come. But it is not true that just with the advent of avatars the world will change for the better. This is the sport of the Lord. If all are liberated, where will be the play of the Lord? An artist is painting a picture. He cannot paint using only one colour. The picture will be complete when there is a harmonious blend of all the colours. The Upaniṣads declare:

Dvayā ha vā prājāpatyā devaścāsuraśca;

Tataḥ kāṇiyasā eva devāḥ jyāyasā asurāḥ.

The descendants of Prajāpati were of two types: the gods and the demons. For obvious reasons, the gods were indeed few in number and the demons were numerous.

[—*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.3.1.]

God incarnates only to correct the lifestyle of human beings. Sri Ramakrishna has said that when Rāma incarnated, only 12 sages recognized him as the Lord. The others thought he was Rāma, the son of King Daśaratha. Deluded by the power of *māyā*, hu-

man beings cannot comprehend the true nature of God; and this is happening since time immemorial. This world is impermanent, and the avatar too is coming and going; but only a few can understand him.

So it is not true that the world will be transformed in no time just because Sri Ramakrishna came. But this is also true that his life has inspired a number of people. Doctors are trying to cure diseases. Does that mean all the diseases in the world are gone? God comes as the human being to sport here, and since ordinary minds are impure, they cannot recognize Him. The number of demonic type of human beings is far more than the godly type. If they so wish, people can change themselves through the practice of sadhanas. He who has attained love for the divine bliss can enjoy it by being alert and practising spiritual practices.

During the years when Sri Ramakrishna lived at Dakshineswar, some people stayed with him all through the day. There were neighbours and others. Did they have spiritual awakening? I shall tell you of one such day. Swami Saradananda was sitting with devotees. Amongst the devotees sat a newcomer. He said: 'I have come to have holy company.' Saradanandaji replied: 'Is holy company so easy? When Sri Ramakrishna was a priest at the Kālī temple at Dakshineswar, there were priests, workers, neighbours and others who lived all the 24 hours near him. But no improvement was noticed in any of them, though they lived with the avatar himself.'

Individuals go according to their natures. So to reach a particular goal, the noble mind takes to noble paths while the ignoble goes along the ignoble path. Sri Ramakrishna saw God in the so-called sinners too. He is travelling by a carriage and sees some drunkards enjoying their inebriated state. Seeing them, Sri Ramakrishna experiences the bliss of

Brahman. He was so pure! Some woman of bad character stands at her door in the forbidden locality. Seeing them, Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Jai Mother Anandamayī! Jai Mother Anandamayī!' Such was his way of looking at things.

Consider Swami Vivekananda himself. He is staying as the royal guest of the king of Khetri. A dancer is about sing and the king invites Swamiji to listen to her songs. Swamiji sends word that he being a monk cannot go to listen to the songs of the dancer-girl. So Swamiji does not go. But since the king forces Swamiji to come, he has to go. Meanwhile, that dancer begins to sing:

Prabhu mere avagūṇa cit na dharo

Samdarśi hai nām tihāro, cāhe to pār karo.

'O Lord! Please do not consider my faults. Your name is Same-sightedness; so please save me. The knife is used both for worship (in dressing fruits) and for killing animals by the butcher, etc.' Listening to the singer's heart-rending prayer and pain through her song, Swamiji is moved. He says: 'Mother, you have said the right thing. Everywhere there is Brahman alone. No one is a sinner.' It is said in the Bible that you see evil in the world only because your eyes are bad. To Sri Ramakrishna, nothing was bad or evil: everything was pure and holy. To him the same Brahman is present everywhere. So whom will he discard, who will he own? It is like standing on the Calcutta Monument and seeing everything as the same: the mounds and troughs appear alike.

In Holy Mother's life too we see instances of equanimity. Mother's love was for everyone. Amjad was a dacoit, but all the same, Holy Mother called him 'son' and showered her love on him as she would on Swami Saradananda, her faithful attendant.

—Compiled by *Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar*

Spiritual Life and Economic Need

SWAMI PRABUDDHANANDA

Swami Prabuddhanandaji Maharaj is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and the head of Vedanta Society of Northern California, USA. This article is based on a talk he gave at an AHIMSA conference. Pravrajika Vrajapranaji has prepared this transcript. This article is a gift to us from AHIMSA.

Science and technology provide us with so much detailed information; it is really mind-boggling. I was wondering what language should I use. My language will be simply a layman's language. Spiritual life is a natural way of living, based on ordinary facts of daily life, which are understandable to all of us, whether one is a university professor, a scientist, or an ordinary person, man or woman living anywhere in the world. Everyone should be able to understand this language. All our spiritual masters spoke that language. Today I will share with you a few ideas of these great masters.

First of all, we have been talking at length about taking action in different spheres; for example, trying to curb carbon dioxide emissions in 77 days. It is true that we have spoiled the atmosphere, but it is equally true that we can also improve it. These ideas have a place, no doubt, but we have to keep in mind that while there are many things that we can do, there are just as many things that we cannot do. Our unaided human efforts are limited. However, there is a cosmic power or spirit that is working through our minds and beyond them as well. We should do whatever we can to improve our lives and the lives of others, simultaneously recognizing that this higher power also is working. This is one point that is emphasized by our spiritual teachers: *the existence of a cosmic power working in and through the universe.*

The next point is that *growth and expansion cannot be stopped.* There is a tremendous urge to possess more; it is deep-seated in the

human psyche. 'If I have one car, why not two?' This consumer spirit cannot be curbed so easily; it increases in geometrical proportions. The desire for money and possessions is insatiable. In fact, according to modern economists progress depends upon consumerism. This compulsion to possess cannot be deflected by anyone individually or collectively.

Thousands of years ago the ancient sages recognized that this urge for possessing more was actually the urge for perfection, for something big. At this level, the word 'big' is not to be understood in a metaphysical sense. It simply means the insatiable urge for more. In other words, we are never satisfied with what we have. This urge has to be channelled carefully. That is why in Vedanta, and Hinduism, four goals of life are presented—satisfaction of desires (*kama*), acquisition of wealth (*artha*), righteousness (*dharma*), and freedom (*moksha*). But a question naturally arises, 'How to get the most out of life?' It is through the practise of morality, virtue, and right living or dharma that we can live a fuller life. I'll give one or two examples to illustrate this point. When you are striving to increase your wealth, follow the principle of give and take. If you always take, you will soon find out that you get very little. One of the first moral instructions is: 'Don't steal.' If you want more wealth, work hard through legitimate means. One of the Upanishads enjoins us not to covet the wealth of others. What others possess has nothing to do with you. The positive side of this instruction is, give and take. If I help you and you help me, we will both benefit. I'll tell

you a small story.

It seems that once God gave a banquet to which he invited all people. God served his guests a plate of laddus, a popular Indian sweet. He requested them to eat the tasty sweets. The guests were very enthusiastic until they heard God's two conditions. 'First,' he said, 'you should not bend your elbow.' Some people thought, 'How can we possibly eat without bending our elbows?' So they got down on their hands and knees and started eating like cats and dogs. God immediately retorted, 'No, you can't eat like animals.' They began to grumble, 'God has invited us here just to insult us.' Then someone said, 'I have a plan: without bending my elbow I'll put a laddu in your mouth and you put one in my mouth. Then all of us can eat to our hearts' content.' So the principle of give and take in economics works in a similar way for the mutual benefit of all concerned.

Another instruction given is: 'Don't compete.' By competing you actually get less. Do you accept this? Ordinarily competition is considered necessary for growth. But this is a primitive way of understanding growth. Work hard and wait. This requires patience. But if we persist we can all increase our wealth mutually without running a race or knocking each other down. Otherwise, so much energy is wasted. You may increase your wealth, but do it according to dharma. Therefore our teachers exhort us to conserve our energy through the practise of dharma.

The Sanskrit word 'dharma' is derived from a verb root meaning 'that which makes you strong of firm.' When you acquire more money or possessions, it should make you strong. In any society an efficient economic structure is necessary for growth both individually and collectively. Just to live we need so many things, beginning with our own bodies. Then to maintain the body we need a job, a house, a family, neighbours, the list goes on and on. We need these things to live, but to live a well-balanced life that brings happiness, the wisdom to live rightly according to dharma is

essential.

The issue really centres around how we view and handle all of these things. It is obvious that many societies are becoming more complicated and sophisticated. Who can stop it? It is the spirit of the age. What is considered a luxury today becomes a dire necessity tomorrow. And this trend will continue. A hundred years from now life will have become still more complicated. If we take a look at history, this is what has happened and is happening. The ancient teachers recognized this pattern as part of the world process. The actual process that goes on is not in our hands. By whatever name you call it—God or Supreme Spirit—a cosmic power is working in and through this world process.

So how do we fit into the overall scheme? What is our role here? There are two aspects of dealing with economics in this light: one is objective and the other is subjective. The objective aspect is determined by how we use certain commodities such as money, all the technological advantages that are available, material possessions and so on. If handled in selfish ways, catastrophes and tragedies result; if handled unselfishly with a generous spirit and largeness of heart, many people are benefited. The subjective aspect is governed by our attitudes. In ethics and spiritual life this aspect is given more importance. A person with a spiritual bent of mind faces certain facts of life boldly and asks questions such as: 'Whose wealth, property, are these really? To whom do they belong?' You may retort, 'They are mine!' But for how long do you own anything? Pause and see what happens. If you take a more comprehensive view you can't help but observe that everything changes hands sooner or later, either because of death or some other loss or separation. We have a very loose hold on things. Take the United States, for example. Before 1492, whose land was it? Even our so-called personal achievements are not really ours. Einstein remarked, 'People may praise me for my scientific achievements, but so many other scientists

have also contributed to my work.'

From a broader point of view, money, etc belong to all people. Those things are not yours and mine alone. Then what is our job here? We are just caretakers. At any moment we can be transferred elsewhere by that cosmic power. Using a different language, time brings change, or the government does it, or you and I may appear to do it. The result is the same: things are temporary; anything may happen anytime. We are only here for the moment. So having the attitude of a caretaker, handle intelligently whatever has fallen to your lot for the moment. Then you can have peace of mind. Otherwise, you may have tremendous wealth, and great achievements,

but you won't be able to enjoy them.

Spiritual life, the inner life, gives us the perspective to do this. The *Bhagavadgita* says, 'Whatever you do, do it with detachment.' Economics and other pragmatic sciences or systems such as technology, industry, trade, commerce, agriculture, and so on, though not having an ultimate value, have an incidental and instrumental value, which leads us to what we call perfection, human perfection. If you work with this attitude, the fourth goal will come. You will realize perfection; your inner being will open up allowing you to come face to face with truth. This truth is what Vedanta calls the Self, Spirit, or God. □

The Modern American Trend

SWAMI SARVAGATANANDA

Srimat Swami Sarvagatanandaji Maharaj is the head of our Boston and Providence centres in the USA. He was also one of the chaplains in the world-famous MIT for forty years, from 1955 to 1995. The following interesting transcript was sent by him.

An MIT student used to come to me often for counselling. He was a bright student and, after graduating from MIT, got a job there. Finally, he became a professor and also married a nice girl. I presented to him a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* on the occasion. Both were interested in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, but they felt uncomfortable whenever they came across the words 'woman and gold'. When the professor told me about this, I asked him to read only what they liked and ignore the rest.

After a long time, once the faculty and the chaplains of MIT were invited for lunch with the president of MIT. Our professor friend came and sat by my side and asked me how many copies of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* I had. I asked him: 'So you want to burn them all?' 'No,' he replied, and said that he wanted to buy them and distribute them amongst his friends. Then he told me about a meeting that took place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, sometime before. Many psychologists, religious leaders, scientists and others had gathered there. The theme of the meeting was: 'The Modern American Trend'. They talked about many points like power, profit, pleasure, politics, etc. Finally, a social scientist got up and said: 'Many of us in America worship the "Dollar King and Sex Queen."' 'Then,' our professor said, 'I immediately remembered what Sri Ramakrishna says in the *Gospel* in the same way. He speaks of "woman and gold."' He continued: 'We in America need the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna more than Indians. That is why I am interested to present some copies of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to my friends.' Naturally, I gave him some copies of the *Gospel* and he was very pleased. □

Service to Humanity

Swami Akhandanandaji was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Not much is known about his service to the poor, and struggle to educate the masses. A few incidents are being published here, based on Swami Chetananandaji's God Lived With Them. Please read such accounts against the modern-day service famous people render to the poor, where the camera and the press are imperative.

Swami Akhandanandaji (Gangadhar Maharaj) visited Tibet. He learned the Tibetan language in fifteen days, and stayed there for three months. Observing the lamas' luxury, their love for money, food, and dress, he spoke to them on behalf of the poor. Because of this, the lamas kept him captive in the monastery and tortured him. One lama hit him on his shoulder with a sword in its scabbard. The poor people loved him, and once several of them told the lamas of his sympathy for them. Akhandananda was summoned again. This time the lamas said that they would cut open his jaw or keep him in life-long imprisonment if he persisted in speaking out for the peasants. But with the help of some friendly traders, Akhandananda ran away. He returned to Badrinath via the Niti Pass.

Akhandananda then went to Khetri in Rajasthan and lived there for nearly eight months. He observed the pitiful condition of the masses as well as the luxury of a handful of rulers and rich landlords. His heart melted for the downtrodden, and he drew to the local rulers' attention his concerns, asking them to ameliorate the poor condition of the masses. He wrote a letter to Swamiji in America, asking him for guidance. Swamiji wrote:

'The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God.'

So in 1894 Akhandananda began his campaign against poverty. He found that the root of all suffering was the appalling ignorance of the masses; hence, education became his prime objective. He moved from door to door impressing upon the residents of Khetri the need to educate their children. By his strenuous efforts he succeeded in raising the enrolment of the local high school from 80 to 257, as well as improving the teaching staff. He next visited the villages around Khetri and started five primary schools for the village boys. The Maharaja of Khetri afterwards made an annual grant of 5,000 rupees for the promotion of education in his territory. At Akhandananda's request, the Sanskrit School at Khetri was converted into a Vedic School; he also raised money to buy books for the poor students.

After Khetri, Akhandananda visited Jaipur, Chitore, Udaipur, and many other places of Rajasthan. He asked the local rulers to start schools, distribute food among the poor, and support cottage industries. Some rich landlords would lend money to the farmers and then demand high interest. They did not like the swami's revolutionary ideas. Even the king of Udaipur



Swami Akhandananda

became upset when Akhandananda refused to take food from the royal priest unless the poor people were fed first. Some of these enraged people threatened his life. Akhandananda was undaunted. He succeeded in starting several schools and performing other philanthropic activities in Rajasthan.

In 1897, Akhandananda went to Murshidabad, West Bengal. He writes:

'Early one morning I washed my hands and feet in the Ganges and was approaching the bazar when I discovered a Muslim girl of about fourteen, clad in dirty rags, weeping bitterly. She held at her waist an

earthen pitcher, the bottom of which had given way.' When the swamiji inquired the cause of her grief, she said: 'Father, there is famine, and we have nothing at home to eat. At home we have only this pitcher for carrying water and two earthen cooking pots. There is no second vessel to carry water. My mother will beat me....' He took the girl to a shop and bought a pitcher for her as well as some puffed rice. Before he got his balance from the shopkeeper, he was encircled by a dozen children,

crying for food. He bought more puffed rice with the remaining coins and distributed it among the hungry children. At night he decided to leave that place as soon as possible, because he felt completely helpless and unable to relieve the poor. As he was leaving the village in the morning, a middle-aged woman approached him, saying: 'Father, Gaya Vaishnavi, an old woman, is dying. Please do

something for her.' The swamiji expressed his inability to do anything, but later relented at her insistence. He went to see this old woman, who was suffering from diarrhoea and covered in filth. To save her life, the swamiji rushed to the local landlord and begged daily

food for her. He even begged a piece of cloth from the clerk for that woman. The woman was saved. Akhandananda started towards Behrampur, the district town of Murshidabad. He stopped for one night at Bhabta village. When he was about to leave, he heard a voice say thrice: 'Where will you go? You have many things to do here.' Thus began his superhuman struggle for the poor of Mahula and Murshidabad. □



Swami Akhandananda in Sargachi, Murshidabad

Go from door to door amongst the poor and lower classes...and teach them religion. Also, let them have oral lessons on geography and such other subjects... Go to...villages from time to time, and teach the people the arts of life as well as religion. Work, worship, and Jnana (knowledge)—first work, and your mind will be purified; otherwise everything will be fruitless like pouring oblations on a pile of ashes instead of in the sacred fire.

—Swami Vivekananda

Ravidās

PROF RAS MOHAN CHAKRABORTY

A modified translation of an article by Prof Ras Mohan Chakraborty in the now defunct Bengali journal Bharatavarsha (Baishakh, 1337), titled 'Madhya Juger Bharatiya Sadhak' is presented here.

The fact that a humblest and lowliest person too can attain the highest spiritual Truth just by holding on to God is evidenced in a great saint of the middle ages, whose name was Ravidās. Ravidās was a cobbler. But owing to his superhuman sadhana, he transcended the limitations of his caste to such an extent that even the queen of Chitore felt herself blessed by becoming his disciple.

There are four main branches of Vaiṣṇavism in India. The *Padma Purāṇa* mentions them as follows:

*Ataḥ kalau bhaviṣyanti
catvāraḥ saṁpradāyinaḥ;
Śrī-brahma-rudra-sanako
vaiṣṇavā kṣiti-pāvanāḥ.*

There will be four Vaiṣṇava faiths in India, and will be known as the Śrī, Brahma, Rudra, and Sanaka faiths.

The meaning of this is, four Vaiṣṇavas belonging to four different cults will be born from Goddess Lakṣmī, Brahmā, Rudra, and Sanaka respectively. The *Prameya-Ratnāvalī* says:

*Rāmānujaṁ śrīḥ svīcakre
madhvācārya caturmukhaḥ;
Śrī-viṣṇu svāmināṁ rudro
nimbādityaṁ catuḥ-sanak.*

Lakṣmī accepted Rāmānuja, Brahmā accepted Madhvācārya, Rudra accepted Viṣṇusvāmin, and Catuḥsana (Sanaka) accepted Nimbārka as the progenitors of their respective cults.

We all know that all these four great masters have spiritual groups following them. Are such cults necessary? Scriptures (see *Gautamiya Tantra*) say: '*Sampradāya-vihīno ye santrāste niṣphalā matāḥ*, without belonging to a religious group, it is difficult to proceed in

spiritual life.' The Bengali *Bhaktamālā* also says: '*Bine saṁpradāyī guru upāsanā vyartho; Kṛṣṇa-bhakti dūre bahu na jāy anartho*. Without belonging to a religious group, the worship of the teacher is useless; the love for Kṛṣṇa is far away, and the mental pollution is difficult to erase.'

Rāmānuja's Vaiṣṇavism is called Śrī-saṁpradāya, the cult of Śrī or Lakṣmī. Rāmānuja's disciple was Devānanda, Devānanda's disciple was Harinanda, Harinanda's disciple was Rāghavānanda, and Rāghavānanda's disciple was Rāmānanda. Rāmānanda was a great proponent of the Śrī-saṁpradāya.

However, Rāmānanda wasn't known just as a religious mendicant alone. He was also a great reformer, and so has earned a place of distinction for himself. The tradition of *ācāris* or traditionalists had been in vogue since the time of Rāmānuja himself. These *ācāris* were very strict so far as food and other habits were concerned. They would eat in seclusion lest the 'eyes' of others fall on their food and pollute it. Rāmānanda was not of this type: he did not believe in such little details. He had gone on a pilgrimage once. When he returned, his traditionalist friends told him that he had to undergo penitence and then only would he be accepted into the fold once again. Rāmānanda was not interested in silly penitence. And he failed to convince his friends of the futility of silly traditions. So he came out of the *ācārī* cult and started his own, which came to be known in later times as 'Rāmānandī' or 'Rāmāyat'.

Rāmānanda was not only against such

silly traditional practices but also against the clutches of caste. He began preaching the gospel of salvation and devotion to everyone, irrespective of caste or creed. In this way, of Rāmānanda's twelve important disciples, all were from the lower communities. Sena was a barber, Dhanna was a low-born farmer, Kabir was a fisherman, and Ravidās was a cobbler. Of the 72 less important disciples, 56 were from the so-called 'untouchables'. In those days, women had no entry into the spiritual world. Rāmānanda made disciples from women also. Of the women aspirants, two names are important: Kṣemaśrī and Padmāvati.

Of Rāmānanda's twelve famous disciples, Ravidās was special. He founded a branch of Vaiṣṇavism called Ravidāsī. We have already mentioned that he was a cobbler. Owing to his great spiritual prowess, Rāmānanda like an expert jeweller discovered that inside that cobbler was a jewel of immeasurable value. Getting around all caste barriers, he had initiated Ravidās into the Vaiṣṇava faith. To go against all set conventions in an age which was nothing less than narrow and begotten was something supernatural indeed, and we in this modern age and the present situation can't imagine the broadness and boldness with which Rāmānanda worked. And it was not unusual for a saint who had come out of the narrow social conventions to initiate a cobbler. But the people of those days, used as they were to the begotten world, couldn't accept it as something natural for a saint but had a supernatural story composed around it.

The devotees describe Ravidās's birth, initiation, etc in this manner. A disciple of Rāmānanda would go about begging things for the Lord's worship. One day it had rained heavily. Instead of going from door to door, the disciple went to a shopkeeper, and upon his request, accepted everything from him. Now this shopkeeper used to sell goods to low-caste people and so his offerings couldn't be accepted according to social conventions. Rāmānanda began offering food to the Lord,

but when he couldn't find the Lord in his heart as was usual, he asked his disciple: 'From whom did you bring these things?' Rāmānanda became annoyed and cursed his disciple to become a cobbler in his next birth. So the disciple took birth in a cobbler's house. The cobbler baby did not even drink milk upon birth; it only cried because it had the memory of its previous birth. Not knowing what to do, the parents took the child to Rāmānanda. The moment he saw the baby, Rāmānanda recognized it. He recited a mantra in the baby's ears. That very moment the baby's cries stopped. It began to accept milk.

The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (see 'Pratisarga', Chapter 28) also narrates the story of Ravidās. Owing to the Sun's curse, the elder of the Aśvinī twins, Idāpati, was born in a low-caste man's house as Sādhana. The younger, Piṅgalapati, was born as Ravidās in a cobbler's house. Ravidās's father was Māndās. Ravidās came to Kāśī and discussed spiritual life with Kabir; he even defeated the latter. Then he discussed with a monk by name Śaṅkarācārya. Ravidās was defeated this time. Some time later he received initiation from Rāmānanda.

Behind the two stories narrated above, the only historic truth may be that Ravidās was Māndās's son, and that he was born in a cobbler's family. In time, however, Ravidās became a master of various scriptures and earned the love of Rāmānanda like none other. Ravidās lived between the last part of the 15th century and the middle of the 16th. He was a contemporary of Mīrā and Kabir. Kabir himself has mentioned that Ravidās was his contemporary. In Mīrābāī's songs too we find mention of Ravidās's name occasionally. Ravidās's time was a sensitive period in Indian history. Ravidās saw the fall of the Paṭhān kingdom in Delhi and the establishment of the Mughal empire.

Ravidās had flown his flag in no small a place like Kāśī, the brahmin bastion. He would worship the *śālagrāma śilā* there. The pundits of Kāśī could not tolerate a cobbler

doing all this. They reported this to the king of Kāśī. The king had Ravidās brought to the palace and told him that he must give up the *śālagrāma śilā*. Ravidās said politely: 'I am ready to discard it immediately, if only some brahmin is ready to accept it.' The *śālagrāma śilā* was placed on a high pedestal. In spite of their best efforts, the brahmins who were there couldn't dethrone it. Ravidās took that sacred stone easily and the king was not a little pleased with Ravidās.

The pure light of divinity that was burning in the secret chamber of Ravidās's heart did not take time to spread its lustre everywhere. The queen of Chitore, Jhālā (the Bengali *Bhaktamālā* calls her Jhālī, while the *Viśvakośa* calls her Ālī. But Hindi books say her name was Jhālā) heard about Ravidās's fame and wanted to have his darshan. When she spoke for some time with the saint, she became so impressed that she requested him for initiation. Thus the queen of Chitore became a cobbler's disciple. This created a great turmoil amongst the Kāśī brahmins. The queen was unmoved. She told the brahmins: 'All right then. Discuss this issue with Mahārāj (Ravidās). If he fails to convince you that he is right, I shall accept whatever you say.' There was a debate, and the brahmins were easily defeated by Ravidās.

There's an opinion that Mīrābāi received initiation from Ravidās. But there are doubts about its authenticity.

Ravidās was a householder, but his life was that of an all-renouncing mendicant. He would make two pairs of shoes every day and one of them was given free to some devotee; the other was sold, and with the money he received, he somehow managed to look after the family. One day, a brahmin who loved Ravidās immensely gave him a costly ornament. Ravidās gave it back to him, saying that attachment to this ornament may make him forget the Beloved. But the brahmin became adamant and would not take it back at all. So Ravidās had no other way but to accept it.

However, the moment the brahmin left, he put the ornament somewhere out of sheer neglect. Some days later, the brahmin came back to find out if the pecuniary situation of Ravidās had improved. No, it hadn't. The brahmin asked him: 'O Ravidās, what did you do with the ornament?' Ravidās replied: 'I have placed it between two beams in my roof. Please take your ornament back; I don't need it.' The *Bhaktamālā* reports that it was the Lord Himself who had come in the brahmin's guise to test his child.

One time, Ravidās went on a pilgrimage, and happened to pass through Chitore. Queen Jhālā served her guru to her satisfaction. One day, many noblemen of Chitore were invited to the palace. Seeing that Ravidās's seat was placed at the centre, many were unhappy. Some even sat as far away from him as possible. But what was their astonishment when they saw Ravidās sitting next to them!



Ravidās has earned a prominent place in Hindi literature. Almost all of his *sākhīs* and *śabads* are lost to us. Only some 30 *śabads* are included in the *Śrī Guru Granth Sāhib* of the Sikhs. One of the very famous songs of Ravidās says: 'O Narahari, my mind is restless. How can I worship you? If you look at me and I look at you, then only shall there be love. But if you look at me and I don't look at you, my mind itself is becoming lost. You are present in all the *ghaṭas*, that is, living beings. But, alas, though I am seeing all these, I don't understand. I am not accepting the good you have been doing to me. I am moving about with numerous delusions like "me" and "mine". When shall I be liberated? Ravidās says, "O Kṛṣṇa! O Compassionate One! Glory unto you!"'

Ravidās's life ended in glorifying the Lord thus. He passed away and mingled with the Lord, but his life and a few songs that have come down are inspiring people down the centuries. □

The Theories of *Drishti-Srishti* and *Srishti-Drishti*

CHANDRODAYA BHATTACHARYA

Two Advaitic views of creation have been studied by a great scholar of yesteryears, Sri Chandrodaya Bhattacharya. We have taken this article from The Philosophical Quarterly (April 1953).

Drishti-srishti and *srishti-drishti* are two different views, within Advaita, in regard to the ontological status of the world which we experience in our wakeful states. Broadly speaking, the theory of *drishti-srishti* maintains that the *esse* of the world is its knowledge, while the theory of *srishti-drishti* holds that it has an existence which is different from and independent of its knowledge. Since it is a fundamental tenet of Advaita that the world necessarily depends, for its existence, on the Absolute which is of the nature of knowledge, therefore, every Advaitist must support the theory of *drishti-srishti* from this fundamental standpoint of Advaita. However, the word 'knowledge' stands in common discourse not for the Brahmic knowledge which is eternal, but for such particular and finite mental acts of cognition as the perception of a table; and it is by reference to such finite cognitive acts that the distinction between the two theories in question is to be understood. While the theory of *srishti-drishti* says that the things of the world are independent of the mental acts by which they are known, the other theory maintains the contrary thesis that they are not so.

Srishti-drishti

Obviously, the first theory seems to have the support of common sense. The table which I am seeing now existed even before I saw it, and will exist even when I shall not see it. Besides, it is outside, while the act of seeing is inside my mind. The table, therefore, must be different from and independent of the act.

This view seems to go counter to the Advaitic doctrine that matter is an appearance and dependent on intelligence; for if the table were real apart from its perception, it could not possibly be an appearance, since an appearance must not be supposed either to precede or succeed the consciousness to which it appears. The theory of *srishti-drishti* meets this difficulty by contending that although the table has an existence which is independent of its perception, still it is not independent of that eternal and transcendental knowledge which is the ground of the world and which reveals it as long as it exists. It is true that when I saw the table for the first time, I did not feel like having seen it formerly in some other way. I do not seem to be conscious of the table except when I see it or know it by some similar mental act of cognition. But the reason for this is that the transcendental knowledge of the table is not explicit and determinate, like an act of perception. Really speaking, it is the same eternal intelligence which knows the table sometimes transcendently and sometimes empirically, ie with the help of a mental act. The two modes of knowing the table are different from each other; yet both of them are modes of knowing. The table does not come into being with the particular act of seeing it, nor does it depend upon the act. Still, the table should be deemed an appearance. For although it exists even when it is not the object of any cognitive act, still it never exists without being apprehended by the transcendental intelligence.

Drishti-srishti

But the theory of *drishti-srishti* maintains that the table which I am seeing now is not different from my act of seeing it. It neither precedes nor succeeds the act; not do the act and the table differ from each other.

It may be objected against this that since the table, as has already been mentioned, is an extra-mental object and the act is a mental phenomenon, so the one must differ from the other. Even granting for argument's sake that cognitive acts such as perception are the only evidence for the existence of the table, and therefore there is no ground for asserting that the table exists when it is not perceived or known in some other way, one must nevertheless concede that the table is different from its perception.

The theory of *drishti-srishti* solves this difficulty by pointing out that just as there is no evidence for the existence of the table in an unperceived state, similarly there is no evidence for asserting that the table is different from its perception. To say that their distinction is proved by the fact that the one is an outer, while the other is an inner, object is to beg the question. For the words 'inner' and 'outer' already imply this distinction. That we feel and believe that the one is inner and the other outer is not a valid evidence. For a belief requires justification by actual knowledge. It would not be proper to think that the act of seeing the table knows also the distinction between the act and the table. For in knowing this distinction, the act must also know itself; but this would seem to be impossible. An act of cognition is a transitive act

and, as such, it must necessarily be directed not to itself, but to an object which is other than itself. The act of cutting, for instance, cannot cut itself but only such a thing as a piece of wood. Of course, Advaita believes that no mental act can exist even for a moment without being

While the theory of *srishti-drishti* says that the things of the world are independent of the mental acts by which they are known, the other theory maintains the contrary thesis that they are not so.

known. But the knowledge of the act is no finite and particular act, but that eternal and transcendental knowledge which is the Absolute. It may be contended that the Absolute consciousness reveals not only the mental act but also the distinction of the act from its object. But from the standpoint of Advaita this contention, even if it be true, cannot be accepted as a valid proof for the distinction of a cognitive act and its object; for what the transcendental absolute consciousness reveals may, according to Advaita, be false. Thus no evidence can be cited for proving that the table which I am seeing now is different from my act of seeing it.

It may be contended that the very nature of knowledge is such that it must have some object which must be different from itself. A piece of knowledge which has no object is a mere idea and has no basis whatsoever in actual experience. Every piece of knowledge which forms part of actual experience is found to have some object. If this were not so, we should have failed to distinguish one cognitive act from another. But as a matter of fact, the knowledge of the table is felt by us to be different from that of the chair. Every act of cognition has a specific and determinate character of its own. Yet knowledge as such should be the same everywhere. Its specific and determinate character must, therefore, be due to its object.

The theory of *drishti-srishti* removes the above difficulty in the following manner. By saying that a piece of knowledge must have some object which is different from it, is it sug-

gested that unless there be some object to a cognitive act, it is incapable of originating at all? This suggestion must be rejected for the following reason. A cognition comes into being as soon as all its preconditions are fulfilled; and the object of a cognitive act is not found to precede the act invariably. For it is ad-

mitted on all hands that the apparent object of an illusory piece of knowledge is not a precondition of that knowledge. Besides, it is possible that an act of cognition is self-differenced, and does not depend on any object which is different from itself in order to maintain its distinction from other acts of knowledge. The knowledge of the table can well be supposed to have a qualitative distinction which falls wholly within its own nature and is not relative to and derived from its object table. Thus this vast world with its diverse objects can be regarded as nothing but a series of cognitive acts forming the mental history of the knowing subject.

It may be objected that if the above view be true, there should be nothing in the world which could be said to persist for more than a moment; yet we have judgements of identity, based on direct knowledge, which tell us that many objects of the world persist in spite of the fact that their qualities undergo change. The table which I see now is recognized by me to be the same as that on which I was writing yesterday. Such judgements must be considered valid, since they are not contradicted by the rest of our experience.

But this objection is not legitimate. For these judgements are no more valid than similar experiences which occur in the state of dream, illusion, hallucination, etc.

It may be contended that a real snake, which one sees with naked eyes in broad daylight when one is wide awake, clearly differs from the imaginary snake which one wrongly sees in the place of a rope in indistinct light. That there is this distinction is proved by the fact, if proof be necessary at all, that the knowledge of the physical snake is due to objective reasons such as the functioning of sense-organs, while the knowledge of the illusory snake is due to a distorting imagination. Since the sense-organs cannot function except in the presence of the object which is to be known, therefore, there must be a physical snake which exists

both prior to and simultaneously with the act of knowing it. Of course, even when we are dreaming, we feel that the sense-organs function in the same fashion. But this is a mere appearance of sensory activity, while in veridical perception [i.e. truthful perception, that which coincides with reality], there is actual functioning of the sense-organs. Hence the object of valid knowledge must be different from its knowledge, whatever may be the case of the apparent object of an illusion.

The above contention, however, is based on circular argument. For, here, the validity of a cognitive act is sought to be determined by the presence of sense-activity, while the presence of sense-activity is sought to be determined by the validity of the act. Moreover, the object which is believed to exist even when it remains unknown must be considered to be the Absolute itself, from the standpoint of Advaita; for the word 'unknown' in this connection means, for Advaita, 'concealed by ignorance' and it is the Absolute alone that can be concealed by ignorance. Other things originate only after nescience has done its work of concealing the true nature of the Absolute, that is, they are illusory, being products of nescience. Therefore, there is no sense in saying that they are concealed by nescience; for illusory objects can never remain unknown. As long as they exist, they must appear to some consciousness. Moreover, since the *esse* of nescience itself is its *percipi* which is the Absolute, it follows that the *esse* of tables, chairs, etc. which are the products of this nescience is their *percipi*. This implies that if there could be anything at all in regard to which the sense-organs could function, it would not be nescience or any of its products, but the Absolute itself. But Advaita holds that the Absolute is essentially free from all attributes

Advaita holds that the Absolute is essentially free from all attributes and parts...

and parts, and the sense-organs cannot be supposed to function in respect of such an attributeless and impartite entity. Thus although we usually believe that things like tables,

chairs, etc are known with the help of sense-organs, still this belief must be rejected by Advaita. For sense-organs, tables, chairs, etc and the functioning of the sense-organs in regard to tables, chairs, etc are all illusory and therefore be understood on the analogy of dream-experience. Their 'being' too, just like the 'being' of dream-objects, depends on their knowledge.

It may nevertheless be objected that the above view does not accept the threefold distinction between the illusory, the empirical and the transcendental grades of reality, a distinction which is usually maintained by the teachers of Advaita. For it does not grant that there is any object other than the Absolute which can ever remain unknown.

But this objection is not tenable. Granting that the table can exist without being known, it still cannot have the grade of reality which is possessed by the Absolute. If the monism of Sankara is to be maintained, it would therefore be necessary to ascribe, to the table, that grade of reality alone, which is possessed by illusory objects.

It may still be objected that a grade of reality, simply because it is different from the transcendental grade, need not be identical with the illusory; for it can differ from both the transcendental and the illusory grades; and this would amount to the admission of a third grade, namely the empirical.

But this objection too cannot bear scrutiny. For before accepting such an empirical grade, we must first be able to show some actual experience where the concept of empirical (as distinct from both absolute and illusory) reality is illustrated. It would not be proper to point to our knowledge of objects like tables and chairs as an

example of such experience. For common sense considers them to be absolutely real, although Advaita cannot accept this common sense view. Being concerned just now to ascertain the grade of reality of these very objects, an Advaitist, before he applies the concept of empirical reality to them, should know where else within our experience this concept is applied. But no such experience can be pointed out. The only objects within our experience which we consider to be not real are those which we find to be illusory. So if after rejecting the absolute reality of objects like tables and chairs, we seek to ascertain their grade of reality, we have to do it on the analogy of that of illusory objects. It would appear, therefore, that objects like tables and chairs which we experience in our wakeful states have the same grade of reality as illusory objects, if Advaita is true.

There is another difficulty. It has been maintained that no object can ever exist without being apprehended by an act of knowledge. But this cannot be true of objects which are beginningless, because no act of knowledge is beginningless; and Advaitists grant that certain objects such as nescience are beginningless. But this difficulty can be removed if it be maintained that the theory of *drishti-srishti* holds good in the case of all objects except those which have no beginning.

A Comparative Evaluation of the Two Theories

Drishti-srishti and *srishti-drishti* are but different expressions of the same fundamental doctrine of Advaita in regard to the ontological status of the world we see around us. Both the theories are at one in maintaining that this world is not absolutely real but only apparently so and that the only

"Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion..."

—Swami Vivekananda

reality that there is, is Brahman which is absolutely simple and unitary in nature. Now *srishti-drishti* holds that, within the sphere of this apparent reality, there is a legitimate distinction between what is empirically true and what is empirically false, between what persists in time and what is momentary, what is mental and what is extra-mental; while *drishti-srishti* maintains that such distinction within the sphere of apparent reality is not ontologically legitimate and significant, that appearance and illusion are identical, that nothing persists in time, that everything is mental, that the entire world of experience is nothing but a series of successive and momentary mental states. While *srishti-drishti* says that the world is *like* a dream, *drishti-srishti* avers that it is a dream. Both the views are logically self-consistent and consistent with the fundamental Advaitic position. The merit of *drishti-srishti* is that it is simpler, since it accepts only two (instead of three) grades of reality, namely the absolute reality of Brahman and the illusory reality of the world. It would appear, however, that it is not quite adequate to the complexity of human experience, within which falls the distinction between an illusory snake and a real snake, a distinction which is not contradicted by any other experience except the final and saving knowledge of Brahman. Of course, if Advaita is true, the word 'real' as an adjective of such a thing as 'snake' cannot be understood as what is 'absolutely real'. Nevertheless, it can mean what is 'real within the sphere of appearance', without giving rise to any self-contradiction. And since this meaning is compatible with the fundamental Advaitic position and at the same

time retains the empirically valid distinction between a real snake and an illusory one, it is drastic and even unreasonable to ignore and do away with the said distinction, unless there be adequate ground for doing so. The main argument that *drishti-srishti* offers for rejecting this distinction is that there is no satisfactory evidence for its validity. But the question is: Is there any satisfactory evidence for its invalidity? It would not be proper to urge that the burden of proof lies on those who want to retain the distinction. For this distinction is not a hypothesis, but is what forms part of our ordinary experience. On the contrary, the burden of proof would seem to lie on those who would reject the validity of what forms part of ordinary experience. Nor can it rightly be maintained that Advaita demands the rejection of the distinction in question. For although Advaita demands the rejection of the common sense notion that objects like snakes are absolutely real, still it does not demand the rejection of a distinction which falls within apparent reality. Moreover, *drishti-srishti*, too, has to grant, within the domain of appearance, certain objects such as *avidya* which persist in time although they are not eternal. Finally, he who says that the world is no more than a series of successive and momentary mental states accepts the reality (albeit apparent) of such a series. On what evidence does he do so? Evidently on the evidence that such a series actually appears to consciousness. If so, he should have no objection to accepting the distinction between idea and thing, or that between an illusory snake and a real one as having the same sort of apparent reality, since it, too, appears to consciousness. □

All the criticism against the Advaita philosophy can be summed up in this, that it does not conduce to sense-enjoyment; and we are glad to admit that. The Vedanta system begins with tremendous pessimism, and ends with real optimism.

—Swami Vivekananda

The Sanskrit Language: An Overview

By Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat. Translated from French by T.K. Gopalan.
Published by Indica Books, D40/18 Godowlia, Varanasi 221001. Pp. 135. Rs.195.

DR SAROJA BHATE

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Sanskrit is the name of one of the linguistic wonders of the world. It has been the language of India since the dawn of its civilization. It is the oldest living language on the earth. Among its unique features must be mentioned the fact that this 'great great grandmother' has maintained its form and pristine purity through the ages. Sanskrit is unique because it is a natural language with a perfectly well-organized structure, which has remained the same for the last several thousand years. Another interesting feature of Sanskrit is that not only is it in the land of its birth but also in the vast neighbouring lands of Asia. As the name *Samskṛta* indicates, this language was rendered *saṁskṛta*, 'refined' or 'polished', for performing specific functions, like religious, literary and academic. The wealth of literature available in this language is enough evidence to prove the immense popularity it enjoyed since its advent in India till today. Though Sanskrit was popular mainly in educated circles, it still was and continues to be a spoken language. Though it came in conflict with other contemporary languages, Sanskrit has maintained its dignity and grandeur as the language par excellence throughout. The secret behind this everlasting beauty of Sanskrit is perhaps its adaptability to prevalent circumstances and the ability of coexisting with its sister languages. Sanskrit, which reigned supreme as a language of culture, aesthetics and political power of South and Southeast

Asia from the beginning of the Christian era to 1000 AD, continues to be worshipped and respected by people of high taste all over the world.

A concise history and development of this language of India's culture, past and present, is presented by Professor Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat in his book *The Sanskrit Language: An Overview*. The book was originally written in French and titled *Le Sanskrit* (1992). Its able translation into English by T.K. Gopalan has been published under the above title by Indica Books, Varanasi. Extending to 135 pages, and having a small bibliography, the book is divided into five chapters. One finds the essentials of Sanskrit, its history, structure, and a variety of appearances, encapsulated within these few chapters.

The historical journey of Sanskrit described in this work begins with its prenatal stage, discovered outside India in two documents, one of them being a work on hippology written in Hittite in 14th century BC. These documents are important because they attest to the existence of Sanskrit in the middle of the second millennium BC and enable us to date the beginning of the language. The real history of Sanskrit begins in the next stage, marking the foremost appearance of the language documented in texts called the Veda. Therefore Vedic is the name given to the first manifestation of Sanskrit. Sanskrit thus inaugurates itself as a sacred language, a language of reli-

gious texts. As a language of invocations to various deities, Sanskrit appears as a cultivated language with a well-defined structure.

No documents of this period testifying to its use as a language of everyday use are available. Therefore it is difficult to describe the character of Sanskrit as a popular language during the Vedic stage. It would be more proper to say that the popular language was Old Indo-Aryan rather than Sanskrit and did not deviate much from the Vedic, which was a refined version of Old Indo-Aryan. The next stage in the history of Sanskrit is presented by Pāṇini's grammar, the *Āṣṭādhyāyī*, the earliest available document exhibiting Sanskrit as the language of the common man. Here we see, for the first time, a full-length picture of Sanskrit as the language of the lay. Though Pāṇini describes the language of the particular region (Gāndhāra) where he stayed, he has registered variations in the neighbouring regions, particularly in the east and the north. This indicates that during this time Sanskrit was spoken over a vast area that can be called the Indo-Gangetic Plain. Was the Sanskrit described by Pāṇini a spoken language? This question has remained a bone of contention till today. The author has, however, categorically stated that Sanskrit was a living language spoken by the community to which Pāṇini belonged. The author has, perhaps for the first time, drawn the attention of the students of Sanskrit to the *nipātanas* (ready-made forms) and other idiomatic expressions as an evidence to prove that Sanskrit was the first living language of the Pāṇinian society. According to Filliozat, Pāṇini represents a class of scholarly experts of religion and therefore the Sanskrit described by Pāṇini is the language spoken by a class of religious experts. Although religious context is more prominent in Pāṇinian Sanskrit, there is no clear evidence, even a clue, leading to the conclusion that during Pāṇini's time Sanskrit was spoken by the religious community alone. The rich Pāṇinian vocabulary covering diverse semantic areas from craft to art, from kitchen to mar-

ket, from farming to agriculture, aesthetics, and the areas of emotions and feelings ranging from love to hatred speaks in support of the hypothesis that the language constructed from Pāṇini's grammar was the language of the common man. It was the first language of the community of its speakers in the sense that it was their spoken language for all practical purposes.

The *nipātanas* and other idiomatic expressions highlighted by Filliozat further strengthen the hypothesis, because a religious community is not supposed to speak irregular forms of language which fit better on the common man's tongue. Although the use of vulgar dialects at the level of the lowest class in Pāṇinian society cannot be ruled out, since they existed also in the earlier Vedic stage, there is no harm in maintaining that Pāṇinian society at large spoke Sanskrit, while the lowest class conversed in vulgar dialects. The author's remark that 'The representation of the social status of Sanskrit in the consciousness of the users is that it is the language of the educated people, and nothing more, but not a language of birth into a class' (p. 58) applies more to the subsequent stages of the representation of Sanskrit when it was stabilized and obtained supremacy over Prakrit (Prākṛta). Pāṇinian Sanskrit represents, in my opinion, the next stage in the development of the popular Old Indo-Aryan, which existed along with the Vedic as its twin sister and of which no record is available. Pāṇinian Sanskrit thus forms the first attested record of Sanskrit as a popular language, a language of everyday use. Deviating a little from the author I would like to call it 'a fully popular language which would not be dependent on the authority of grammarians' (p. 67). What existed as a popular dialect for Pāṇini became a standardized dialect of the elite, worthy of its name Sanskrit, in the post-Pāṇinian period. And here I would like to draw the attention of the students of Sanskrit to the deeper meaning of the name Saṁskṛta, recorded by Prof Filliozat in this book. After pointing out that the name

Saṁskṛta appears very late, around the 5th or 6th century AD, the author refers to the opinion of traditional pundits that Saṁskṛta means the form of speech constructed by grammar, prepared or made ready by grammar. Sanskrit thus owes its name Saṁskṛta to grammar. The grammar does not, however, show any awareness of this deeper meaning of the name Saṁskṛta. For Pāṇini, the language was just a speech and, as rightly pointed out in this book, 'what Pāṇini in fact did was to import to the users of his language an awareness of its structure of formation' (pp. 33-4). In other words, Pāṇini did not mean to render it *saṁskṛta*, though he was credited by posterity with standardization of the language of India's past. Whatever may be the case, his grammar is described in the most appropriate words by Filliozat as an 'invaluable document on the cultural awareness of an educated Indian of antiquity' (p. 25). Another significant point made by the author about Pāṇini's contribution to the development of Sanskrit is that he 'let his language enrich itself with material from other languages' (p. 34). With the illustration of the pair of roots *nṛt* and *nat* recorded by Pāṇini, Filliozat has shown how Pāṇini's language borrowed from both Middle Indian and Dravidian. Pāṇinian language can thus be described from the linguist's point of view as an amalgam of the popular Old Indo-Aryan and a transposition of Dravidian and Middle Indo-Aryan to some extent.

By the time of Patañjali, Sanskrit evolved to a great extent though its use gradually became confined to the elite. This marks the last stage of the continuation of Sanskrit as the first language. Patañjali's voluminous treatise on grammar, the *Vyākaraṇa-mahābhāṣya*, bears testimony to the considerable growth of Sanskrit by borrowing and assimilation. The author clearly mentions that the Sanskrit of Patañjali was a living language spoken by the *śiṣṭas* (educated). One may observe that from Patañjali's time onwards, Sanskrit started losing its form as a popular dialect and was grad-

ually developing itself into a standard language. Patañjali must be credited with putting in efforts for establishing Sanskrit against the current force of the emerging Prakrit. In the midst of *prākṛtas* (common people) Sanskrit continued as a language of the educated community. After Patañjali Sanskrit appears to have lost one of its vital parts, the tone, and so was relegated to the level of a second language. Throughout its subsequent history, it remained in the second position. Although it has continued till the present time as a spoken language, its representation in Indian culture is of a cultivated language with some cultural contexts.

The history of Saṁskṛta really begins with its stabilization by the three grammarians. It must have been clear by now that the name Saṁskṛta fits more appropriately to the post-Patañjali language, stabilized by the grammarians. It rose to eminence since the beginning of the Christian era and obtained a seat of highest respect, not to be obtained by any other language of India, in the years to come.

The book abstains from giving an account of the subsequent period of the history of Sanskrit, during which it appears more as a literary rather than a spoken language. Sanskrit owes its international status primarily to the classics and other works, such as the two epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, and the *Pāñcatantra* and *Arthaśāstra*. According to Filliozat, literary expression is not a monopoly of Sanskrit. He observes: 'India is the preferred ground for comparative literature, an area of research which is yet unexplored' (p. 112). Though he does not discuss the merits of literary Sanskrit, the author discovers in it an evidence in support of his conclusion on the issue of whether Sanskrit was an all-time spoken language. He says: 'After all is said and done, it can be said that spoken Sanskrit is present everywhere and is well documented in the literature' (p. 106). Thus 'The Sanskrit *kāvya* is not the art of letters, but the art of spoken words. It exploits all the resources of the

language' (p. 113). While one can easily agree with the author on the last statement, his statement about the existence of Sanskrit as a spoken language based on the evidence in literary works can hardly be accepted. According to him the dialogues in simple style scattered throughout Sanskrit literature, which is otherwise written in ornate and ornamental style, are the remnants of the Sanskrit spoken by pundits at a natural level. In my opinion it is not necessary to imagine that a pundit spoke Sanskrit at two levels, one technical and the other natural, as maintained by the author (p. 68). After Sanskrit was relegated to the level of a second language and lost its accent, it must have continued as a spoken language in limited circles with limited functions. A pundit might argue with a co-pundit on some academic issue in Sanskrit. Why should he use Sanskrit for communication on mundane matters, for which Prakrit already was in vogue? The dialogues in simple style found in Sanskrit literature are illustrations of 'literary spoken' rather than 'natural spoken'. The generally accepted view that after Patañjali's time Sanskrit ceased to be a spoken language in the true sense of the term appears to be more acceptable. Sanskrit was indeed spoken during academic *śāstrārthas*, debates, symposia, and other educational activities going on in *pāṭhaśālās* as well as *gurukulas*. It was spoken on some occasions of cultural importance such as convocations. But to imagine a pundit speaking in Sanskrit with his wife or a servant in the house or with a shopkeeper in the market is going too far. The Sanskrit-speaking village called Muttur in Karnataka and the Sanskrit-speaking population of India today are illustrations of artificially spoken Sanskrit rather than Sanskrit at the natural level, which

it has lost once and for all.

In this book, other appearances of Sanskrit, such as religious, scientific and technical Sanskrit have also been discussed. The book concludes with a note on the expansion of Sanskrit in and outside India. After the 7th century Sanskrit became the preferred language for political power and established itself as a pan-Indian language of communication in the next few centuries. The role of Sanskrit as a lingua franca is very prominent since the early centuries after Christ. Even outside India Sanskrit spread mainly because of the efforts of pundits and Buddhist missionaries. The author ends on an optimistic note that Sanskrit has survived and will continue to survive because of its innate ability to adapt and enrich itself.

In summing up, I would like to mention some of the important points made by the learned pundit of France, which can be treated as a significant gift of this book. Firstly, the author has beautifully illustrated how the early grammarians, particularly Pāṇini, played a major role in sculpting Sanskrit into a chiselled form. Pāṇini is acquitted by him, as by a traditional Indian grammarian, from the charge of rendering Sanskrit a dead language. Secondly, the author has stressed the point that Sanskrit was never a monopoly of the upper class in Indian society. He even refers to the *dharmaśāstras*, the legal texts, and points out that there is not a single reference restricting the use of Sanskrit to a class by birth.

The Sanskrit Language: An Overview is the cream of the learned scholar's lifelong pursuit of Sanskrit. His ability to generalize and philosophize is unparalleled. One finds in this book a precise, beautiful sketch of Sanskrit as a chiselled beauty, *la belle*. □

This Sanskrit language is so intricate, the Sanskrit of the Vedas is so ancient, and the Sanskrit philology so perfect, that any amount of discussion can be carried on for ages in regard to the meaning of one word.

—Swami Vivekananda

A Lover of God

Abū Bakr ibn Jahdar ash-Shibli (d. 945) is considered to be one of the greatest mystics of Islam. His life is full of paradoxes and peculiarities. He was called a madman. He was imprisoned several times. But he endured all these sufferings, holding on to God. He became immortal, and here's his story.



Shibli was a rich official under the Caliph of Baghdad, working in Nahāvend. He was young and successful, and had everything one can have. So he was the envy of many around. His enemies had tried to kill him too. The Caliph's mind was poisoned by conspirators, and he became angry with Shibli. So he removed Shibli from his position. This came as a shock to Shibli. He was terribly shaken. 'Are human beings so fickle-minded?' he wondered. He went away to some unknown place near Nahavend, and went on pondering over his sad fate. Then it dawned on him that God alone is true and real. He wept, remembering his own 'successful' days.

Meanwhile, the Caliph realized his folly and began searching for him. His men found him and handed over the royal decree that he had been reinstated, along with the robes of his office. To the consternation of all those present, Shibli wiped his face with that robe. The news reached the Caliph, angered him again, and he had Shibli brought before him. Shibli said: 'O Emperor! You are angry because I dishonoured the official robe by wiping my face with it. But how angry God should be with me because the Most High gave me such a robe of love for Him and I have forgotten Him, thereby dishonouring the robe!'

The Caliph couldn't understand Shibli and took away the authorization once again. Thus the saint Shibli was born.



'You have the heavenly jewel with you. I want to have that,' said Shibli to the great saint, Abū'l Qāsim Muhammad al-Junayd. Junayd stared at Shibli. He nodded and smiled. He said in a low voice: 'You have to struggle to attain that jewel.' Shibli was of course ready to struggle. Those were the days when everyone in Baghdad wanted to be Junayd's disciple. So Shibli was ready to face any test that Junayd was to put him to.

'You were an officer under the Caliph, isn't it? For one year, go and sell salt.' Shibli instantly agreed and began that lowly business in right earnest. It was initially a terrible time for him, trying to avoid people staring at him, questioning him, taunting him and even mocking him openly. He silently endured everything. One year passed. He came back to Junayd. 'There's some slight improvement, but you need a lot more. For one year from today, beg your food in Baghdad.' Shibli shuddered mildly, but regained his composure the very next moment. He began begging for food.

He would return empty-handed to Junayd, who would throw a piece or two of stale bread. Thus one year passed. Junayd said to him: 'Do you understand your true worth now? This is life and this is the world. ...Now, go to Nahavend and seek the pardon of those who might have been ill-treated and humiliated during your tenure.'

That was another cruel test Shibli was put to. He passed that also. But it took him almost four years to meet everyone, convince them of his sincerity, and seek their pardon for all that might have happened during his period as the officer.

Junayd, now more compassionate, said:

'My son, you still have the world about you. I want you to beg for one more year.' Shibli was of course ready to do that this time. He went about without the least hesitation, begging from door to door without any feeling of status or position. People gave him in plenty this time but Junayd would take all those things and distribute among the poor. He would also make Shibli go without food every evening.

At last, having suffered purgatory on this earth itself, having been tried in the furnace for 7 or 8 long years, Shibli was ready. When Junayd asked him how he felt now, Shibli replied: 'I deem myself the meanest of God's creatures.' Junayd was immensely pleased. He embraced his disciple Abū Bakr ibn Jahdar ash-Shibli.



It was an altogether new life for Shibli. He would go about repeating the name of Allah always. He would inspire the young and old of Baghdad too, to repeat Allah's name. But he subsequently gave up this practice, as their repetitions were more of a mockery than devotional outburst.

One day Shibli heard a divine voice: 'How long will you hold on to the Name? Go for the Named!' That was it: a 'madman' had been created. It was like opening the flood-gates of divine aspiration. Shibli became a God-intoxicated soul to the core. He would roam about everywhere, crying for God. He jumped into the waters once but was washed back to the shore. Unable to control his yearning, he jumped into fire once. It was only sheer miracle that he was saved. He too couldn't understand how this happened. He then heard a divine command: 'He who has died for God cannot be killed by others.'

The moment he heard this, a question came up in Shibli's mind: What about Hallāj, his dear friend and senior? Why was he killed? Why was Hallāj's another friend killed? The Lord replied: 'Whom My love kills, for him shall I be blood money.' That is, the seeker who dies for God will be rewarded by God Himself. So God takes care of everyone. What little doubts Shibli had were all gone now. He

became 'mad'. People chained him. As if that wasn't enough, they confined him to a cell. This was repeated ten times. Confinement or no confinement, Shibli continued his contemplation on God.

When people saw Shibli wearing a black gown—the mourning-dress—on an Id festival, someone asked him: 'What's this? Today is a day of joy and you are in this attire! Who are you mourning for?' Shibli said: 'I am mourning because people don't have love for God but are so happy. It's an occasion for immense sorrow.' That man retorted angrily: 'How dare you feel you alone are a lover of God and not others? Are we not lovers of God?' Shibli said softly: 'Yes, you are! You are His devotees. But you are not like that firewood: Do you see that firewood burning there? It's wet, and so while there is fire at one end, water is coming out of the other.' That gentleman couldn't understand Shibli. Shibli explained: 'If the fire of love for God is burning in the heart, the sure sign is tears, not joy.'

Shibli's sadhana was of a rare type. He would squeeze himself into a small hole sometimes, not enough for a small animal, and sit there, praying and weeping for God. In order that sleep should not disturb his aspiration, he would put salt to his eyes. When that would fail, he would take a stick and begin beating himself until sleep left him. God is not cruel. His love is easily obtained. Shibli must have been one of those rare individuals. God showered love on him. So he changed. He began to utter such truths that people were stunned. When the news of this peculiarity reached old Junayd, he was only too happy.

The harsh treatment which Shibli meted out to his body told upon his health. He suffered endlessly. Unable to serve the stern master any longer, the body gave up. Shibli's time had come. People gathered around him. They said: 'Shibli, pray to God; the end has come.' Shibli only smiled at them. When they began to pray, Shibli remarked: 'The dead have come to pray for the living!' Rūzbihān Baqlī, Shibli's faithful follower, compiled his life and sayings for posterity. □

Book Reviews

ŚRĪVIDYĀ KALPALATĀ (Hindi): By Dr Rajendra Ranjan Chaturvedi. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110007. 1998. Pp. xxii+204. Rs.125.

SARATCHANDRA CHAKRABORTY: A DISCIPLE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: By Chaya Banerjee. Published by Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600004. 1999. Pp. 42. Rs.10.

Śrīvidyā is one of the ten *mahāvidyās* of the tantric mode of worship. It is considered to be the heart of all *vidyās* and deals with the theoretical as well as practical aspects of tantric philosophy. It leads the aspirant from the ordinary state to the realization of oneness with the universal Reality through the worship of the Divine Mother Lalitā or Tripura-Sundarī. In Śrīvidyā the phenomena of creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe is explained beautifully with the help of the *śrīyantra*, a figurative representation of the process.

All the above aspects of Śrīvidyā are beautifully dealt with in the book under review. The learned author is a traditional practitioner of Śrīvidyā. The *vigraha* (Lalitā) and *yantra* (of śricakra) have been dealt with in detail in this book, giving an exhaustive information about them. Besides this, the mantra, sources and centres of spiritual power, and the technique of their awakening, the importance of the spiritual preceptor, microcosm, macrocosm, and such other topics related with Śrīvidyā form of tantric philosophy are also discussed in this book. The author has given authenticity to his work by quoting extensively from the sacred tantric literature (but the references appear to be missing). The book has become more useful because of the author's including a classified list of the different names of the Divine Mother, Śrīvidyā Lalitā, as well as a collection of forty verses on kuṇḍalinī yoga in the appendix. Though the book is mainly for aspirants, scholars also can benefit immensely from it. *Śrīvidyā Kalpalatā* contains of two beautiful introductory notes by two noted scholars and Śrīvidyā followers, Jagadguru Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswatiji, and Dr Manish Chandra Joshi.

There is one point which I wish to make: There are two places where incorrect information about Vivekananda (Narendranath in his premonastic days) and Sri Ramakrishna have been given. See pages 2 and 3 for instance. Then there are too many quotations, without references or source information. Hope the author will take note of these in the future editions. On the whole, *Śrīvidyā Kalpalatā* is a worthy attempt, and a useful book.

Swami Nityajnanananda, Belur Math

Sometime in February 1897, Swami Turiyananda introduced a wheat-complexioned young man of 28, clad in a dhoti, shirt and chadar, to Swami Vivekananda. Thus began a brief but intensely intimate and fruitful relationship between Swamiji and Saratchandra (1898-1942). Affectionately called '*bāngāl*' by Swamiji, Saratchandra received initiation from him in May 1897 at Alambazar Math and became a cynosure of his eyes. It was Swamiji who explained to him the subtle nuances of the *R̥g Veda*, which resulted in the latter's writing a commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras* called *Viveka-bhāṣya*. It was once again Swamiji who had encouraged him to compose hymns on Sri Ramakrishna on the occasion of his birthday, which were later compiled in *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Stavamālā*. Saratchandra also wrote a biography of Sri Ramakrishna in verse, called *Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Pāñcālī*. Holy Mother Sarada Devi loved to hear him sing these hymns in his deep, sonorous voice, and the legendary singer from Bengal, Mukunda Das, sang his compositions. Such was Saratchandra's devotion to Sri Ramakrishna that he refused to eat in a zamindar's house because some youths spoke ill of his master. It came to such a pass that a Ramakrishna Mission centre was established on the same premises. His writings on Swamiji inspired Netaji and other freedom-fighters.

All this and many other little-known facts of Saratchandra's life come alive in this brief biography by his granddaughter, Chaya Banerjee. Being his relative, she has access to minute details of his life, which she documents with precision. The book is informative and has historical value. Very little has been written in English on the personal life of this ardent follower of Swamiji, who had kept a written record of his conversations with him. Chaya Banerjee's work is a much-awaited biography of this unassuming personality, especially for the legions of non-Bengali readers who frequently come across his name in various books on Swamiji but had very little material to fall back upon for the facts about his life till now.

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KARMA THEORY: By T. Chellaswami.
Published by Srinivasa Gita Satsang
Trust, Flat No. 3, 31 Radhakrishna Nagar,
Thiruvannamipur, Chennai 600041. 1999.
Pp. iv+56. Rs.30.

The present book is one of a series to propagate Vedantic ideals. *Karma Theory* has attempted to remove popular misconception about the theory of karma. The author has beautifully explained the concepts of transmigration of the soul, the Purusha and Prakriti concepts, *Purushottama*, maya, and how the karma theory is really a boon to escape from transmigration. He has rightly stressed that man is the maker of his own destiny. This is the teaching of Vedanta which needs to be highlighted in the modern world. The first chapter of this book deals with the *jivatman* which, according to the author, is the 'eternal aspect or *amsa* of the supreme Soul,' a Visishtadvaitic concept. Chellaswami next takes up the *gunas* and makes extensive use of the *Gita*. Though the *gunas* give a general pattern of the personality, one has the option to develop anyone individually. The next section is about the Prakriti and Purusha. The fourth chapter begins with the idea of how and why we suffer. It is not action which binds us but the deep involvement in action, attracted by fruits. By attachment to action we are building up tendencies to act again and again. This makes for further existence. This is *karma bandha*. The law of karma is inclusive of the law of heredity. So the author concludes that the soul migrates from body to body. Destiny connects the past with the present and the law of karma explains the past, present and future—in other words, life as a whole. Karma can also influence us in the form of inherited tendency internally and destiny externally. The sequence can be like this: *samskaras* > tendency > habit > character > destiny. We are given the freedom to choose between good and bad, between joy and sorrow.

The author has beautifully explained *sraddha*, the driving power of man, which is a positive mental attitude. A life with an ideal is the need of the hour. To pursue the ideal with diligence requires *sraddha*. Reason, knowledge, devotion and *sraddha* always go together.

The last chapter is important. The karma theory

is not a fatalistic doctrine. On the other hand it is the key for man to work out his destiny. It makes man to beware of his responsibility and to work out his destiny. If my actions made me what I am now, it is implicit that I can carve out my future as well. This is the gist of the karma theory. The book is an interpretation of the *Gita*.

Swami Satyavidananda
Ramakrishna Math, Madurai

SANNYĀSAGĪTĪH (Hindi): By Swami Akhandananda Puri. Published by Oriya Baba Ashrama, PO Ramghat, Dt Bulandshahr, UP. 1996. Pp. 128. Rs.25.

In 1895, during a 7-week stay at the Thousand Island Park on the St Lawrence River in New York state, Swami Vivekananda composed an eloquent poem in English, called 'The Song of the Sannyasin'. It is a 13-verse ode to the supremacy of renunciation. It is the spirit, the essence, and the profound wisdom of renunciation that is stated in this poem, born of the insights into human experience which Swamiji gathered from his glorious life. The 'Song of the Sannyasin' presents in poetic form a compelling command to the renunciate.

The book under review is the Sanskrit version of this 'Song of the Sannyasin', translated by Swami Brahmaswarupanandaji. Initiated into sannyasa by Swami Shivanandaji, the second President of the Ramakrishna Order of monks, Swami Brahmaswarupanandaji is a scholarly monk, and has written a beautiful commentary on each verse of the 'Song', and has also quoted from various authoritative scriptures to explain the theme of the divine poem. The prose order of the Sanskrit verses in this book helps better understanding of the intricate subject matter.

To crown it all is the lucid Hindi translation by Swami Akhandanandaji. This would benefit one and all. This book is a must-read for everyone. The cover page has an attractive photograph of Swamiji as a wandering monk. The price of the book too is low and within the reach of the lay person.

Swami Urukramananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts, the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment. Just as a cow yields much milk when it is well fed, so when the mind is fed spiritual food it will yield greater tranquillity.

—Swami Brahmananda

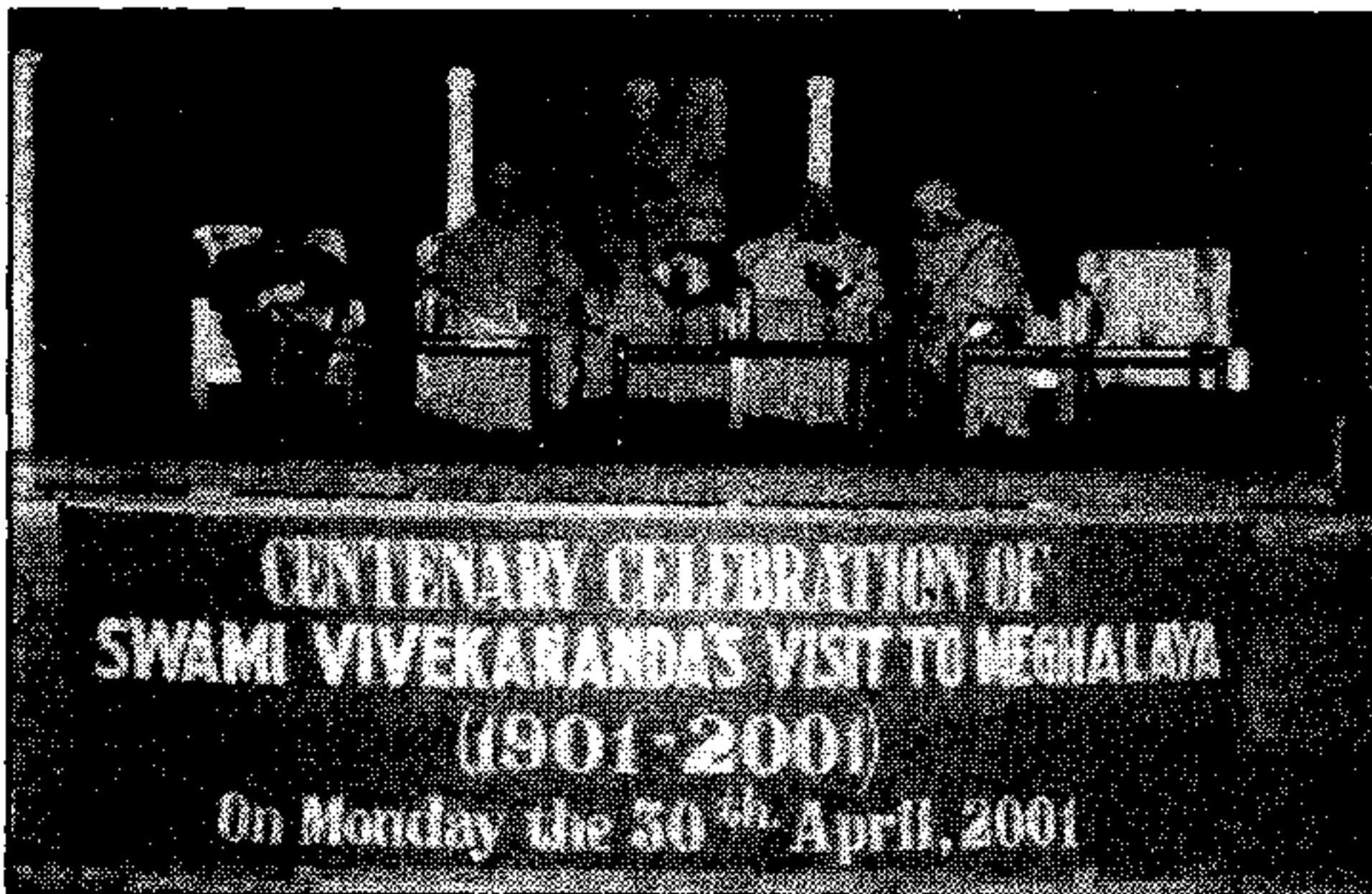
News and Reports

Centenary Celebration of Swami Vivekananda's Visit to Meghalaya

In April 1901 Swami Vivekananda visited the famous temple of Devi Kamakhya near Guwahati on his way back from Chittagong, Bangladesh. Since his health was not well, it was suggested that he stay for sometime in Shillong, a beautiful hill station, for the restoration of his health. At the behest of Sir Henry Cotton, the then chief minister of Assam, Swamiji delivered an inspiring lecture on Indian civilization and her cultural heritage at

stepping-stone for the future work of the Ramakrishna Mission in northeastern India.

To commemorate this historic visit of Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunjee (Sohra), arranged a colourful function on 30 April 2001. Revered Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the function and presided over the public meeting held on the occasion. He also released the special issue of the school magazine. Sri Ranjan



Sri Ranjan Chatterjee and Swamis Ramanandaji, Smarananandaji and Nityamuktanandaji at the inaugural function

Quinton Hall (now Vivekananda Cultural Centre) in Shillong and a large number of citizens attended the function. Sir Cotton later personally met Swamiji and discussed India and her national problems.

This holy visit of Swami Vivekananda had sown the seed of the the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in this part of India. The fruit of that historic visit of Swamiji resulted in the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1924 at Shella village of Meghalaya by Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj (Ketaki Maharaj) and later on at Sohbarpunjee, Cherrapunjee, Shillong, and other places. In this way Shella village became the



Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj releasing the special issue of the school magazine (see report)

Chatterjee, Commissioner/Secretary, Department of Education, Government of Meghalaya, was the special guest and addressed the gathering. Revered Swami Ramanandaji Maharaj, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math, also spoke a few words at the meeting. Students of the Ashrama school gave short speeches, recited some poems composed by Swami Vivekananda, and sang devotional songs. Swami Nityamuktananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunjee, welcomed the large number of people who attended the celebration irrespective of their religious affiliations, and thanked the teachers, students and the Ashrama staff for making function a success.

Corrections

In our August 2001 issue, on p. 416 (col. 1), please read 'The subject of science is something beyond' as 'The subject of religion is something beyond'.

In our September 2001 issue, we had published an article titled 'Reminiscences of Swami Vishuddhanandaji'. He was the eighth President of the Ramakrishna Order, not seventh.

The errors are regretted.